



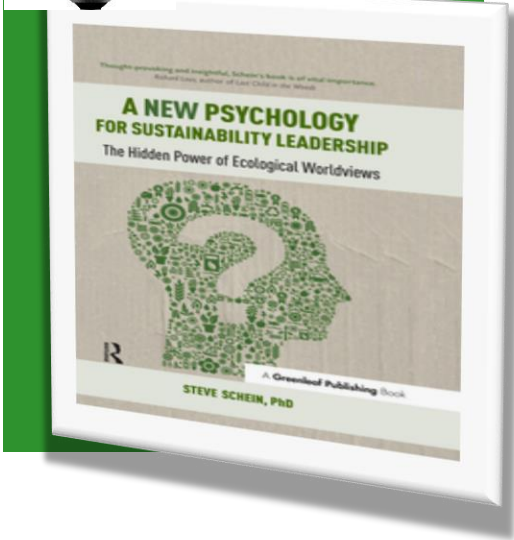
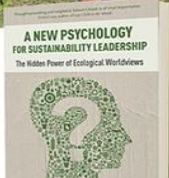
The extent to which we perceive our interdependence with nature affects our actions towards sustainability. As educators, executives and activists, we need a new, shared understanding of what sustainability leadership must become. We need a new story, a new language and, most of all, a new psychology.



PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

"This book is a tour de force, beautifully charting a path to planet changing leadership."

—Barrett C. Brown, PhD, Co-Founder, MetalIntegral Academy; author, *The Future of Leadership for Conscious Capitalism*



# A New Psychology for Sustainability Leadership: *The Hidden Power of Ecological Worldviews*

Executive Summary by Sari Martin

**O**verview: The influence of sustainability has grown in the corporate world but the qualities and behaviors of sustainability leaders have not been examined extensively at the individual level. Steve Schein’s aim is to discover themes and commonalities of what makes Sustainability Leaders tick. This book explores the transformational leadership of leaders driving this ecological consciousness in business, what their inner motivations are, and their ability to lead change.

**Introduction.** Schein thought he had optimistic views on sustainable businesses until one student at a conference challenged his examples of ecologically ethical companies. As he explained the positive, green corporate changes, he realized he had no personal cases or research on the leaders themselves, their ethics, psychology, motivations, and worldviews. Was sustainability just a marketing ploy? He decided to study 75 executives who were leaders in sustainability to find out what their drivers were, what made them authentic, and what created their ecological worldviews. Understanding how sustainability leaders became so, is Schein’s motivation.



**Life Experiences.** The majority of the executives described distinct life experiences that shaped their worldview in becoming sustainability leaders.

**Family of Origin and Early Childhood Experiences in Nature.** Early childhood experiences shaped these sustainability leaders’ worldviews. They describe childhoods with families who composted or recycled bags before it became a trend, or being on farms and orchards, and overall just being outside in nature.

**Environmental Education and Memorable Teachers.** The majority of the study subjects also expressed having influential teachers in environmental courses in college that influenced their worldviews.

**Seeing Poverty and Environmental Degradation.** Many of the leaders had worked overseas in developing countries with the Peace Corps or Volunteer Organizations, for example. Witnessing environmental damage and disregard first hand had a significant impact on their worldview.



## About the Author

Steve Schein is a sustainability leadership educator, researcher, corporate strategist, and executive coach. After 25 years in the corporate world and 10 in academia, he sees the evolution of business leadership and education towards ecological sustainability as a global imperative. To that end, his research focuses on development of ecological and post-conventional worldviews in the setting of multinational corporate leadership. Steve is passionate about helping leaders and teams tap into their deeper motivations to cultivate mission driven organizations.  
<http://steveschein.net/biography/>

“For first time, I grasped that how we specifically think about ourselves in relationship to nature, and the extent to which we are consciously aware of our interdependence with nature, could determine how we act as corporate executives, entrepreneurs and, ultimately, as sustainability leaders.” (p. 72)

**Perceiving Capitalism as a Vehicle for Environmental or Social Activism.** Schein found it surprising how many senior sustainability executives of multinational companies had experience working in NGO's and/or in the public sector. They had started their careers motivated to work on environmental issues and decided that moving to the private sector would leverage their impact on the world.

**A Sense of Spirituality and Service.** The 5<sup>th</sup> type of life experience frequently reported by the sustainability leaders was a sense of service and spiritual development. They claim feeling a sense of life purpose. Their spirituality is rooted in a belief of interconnectedness with nature.

**Worldviews.** Our worldview is how we see ourselves in relation to the world and what our place is.

### How do you see the world?



**Anthropocentric.** This view is based on a "belief that humans are at the centre of the universe and the most significant species on earth. It assumes that all phenomena in the world should be interpreted in terms of human values and experiences" (p. 59). Ultimately, the view also purports that we can control nature through technology.

**Ecocentric.** This worldview expresses a belief that humans are dependent, embedded and intertwined in the Earth's ecosystem. An ecocentric person see humans as one of many species important to the earth, and similarly fighting for survival. The earth is the centre and the driving force, and we are merely stewards of it.

**The Ecological Self.** The part of us that identifies as part of nature. Psychologists further the definition into sub-categories such as "Deep Ecology", which refers to where we are in our ecological self-development and awareness. Eco-psychology occurs when we have a direct experience of connection with nature. It is through these experiences that we develop empathy. People can change their

perceptions of the self and nature, reducing the distance between us and nature, through environmental connectedness. Sean Esbjorn\_Hargens and Michael Zimmerman developed an ecological-self framework with detailed descriptions of the definitions we can have of ourselves. There are patterns of behaviors in which we interpret our place within the natural world.

**Evidence of Ecocentrism** Schein discovered 5 repeated distinct expressions indicative of an ecocentric worldview and developed ecological self that sustainability leaders described.

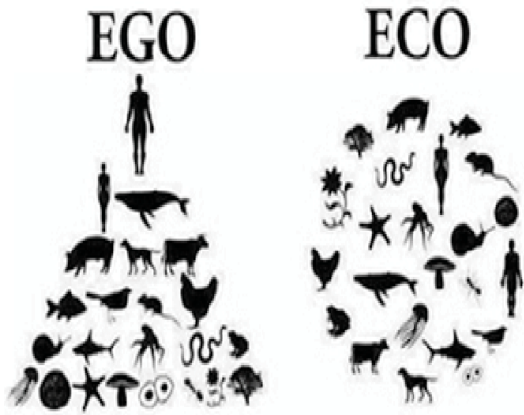
- 1. Ecological Embeddedness.** A strong awareness of our part within the Earth's biosphere. One executive at a major apparel company said, "I've always understood at a fundamental level that the economy and society are within the context of the environment. So, we really can't do anything without paying attention to the ecological context within which we live" (p. 73).
- 2. An Awareness of the Vulnerability of the Planet's Ecosystems.** This entails a heightened awareness of the delicateness of the earth's biodiversity and ecosystems. "I have had a bit of a shift in my thinking. There are so many reasons to limit the amount of carbon into the atmosphere. The health of the oceans is a major one. They are taking a big beating due to acidification to the point of dying", believed one executive at a global food manufacturer (p. 74).



Discipline	Theorists	Key concepts and themes
Eco-psychology	Roszak Hillman O'Connor Conn Kahn Doherty	Anthropocentrism of psychology Eco-psychology, health and wellbeing Developing sensory awareness Human relationship with technology Environmental identity
Deep ecology	Naess Sessions Drengson Devall Fox Macy Abram Capra	Deep vs. shallow ecology: ecological maturity Ecological self Technocratic vs. planetary-person paradigm Ecocentrism vs. anthropocentrism Ecological transpersonal philosophy Ecological self: paradigm shift Ecological embeddedness Systems thinking: web of life
Environmental sociology	Dunlap Hedlund-de Witt Bragg Kempton	New ecological paradigm Integral worldview framework Constructionist theory/expanded self-concept Environmental values
Social psychology	Bateson Koltko-Rivera Ray and Anderson	Ecology of mind Hidden nature of worldviews Cultural creatives
Ecological economics	Beddoe <i>et al.</i> Costanza Daly Meadows	Redesign dominant socioeconomic regime Valuing natural capital Steady-state economy, pre-analytic vision Limits to growth
Integral ecology	Esbjörn-Hargens O'Brien Hulme Hedlund-de Witt	Ecological selves framework Reframing climate change debate Social meanings of climate change Integral perspective of worldviews
Indigenous studies	Four Arrows (Jacobs) Hart Pewawardy Cajete	Indigenous education/paradigm shift Indigenous worldview and social work Indigenous worldview as eighth intelligence Storehouse of ancient environmental wisdom



**3. A Belief in the Intrinsic Value of Nature.** A significant distinction of an anthropocentric or ecocentric worldview is whether a person believes we serve nature or nature serves us. "But I think where the conflict arises is that in an effort to speak to the mainstream, the language is being reduced to a story of nature that serves humanity through economic and human wellbeing...However, for many of us who have a broader view of the interrelationship and interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world, that is problematic" (p. 77).



**4. Enhanced Systems Consciousness.** Another distinctive characteristic of an ecocentric worldview is the ability for a leader to view their organizations within an ecosystem, and understanding its role and effects within that ecosystem. One executive states, "...we've got to find a way to move from the goal of just understanding the natural environment to the realization that we ourselves are causing the environment to change drastically around us for the first time in the history of man," (p. 79).

**5. Earth-centric Circles of Identity.** This means the ability to identify with the care and stewardship of a variety of human communities and species. This is an extension of interconnectedness to a wider global community with a breadth of understanding. One way to do this is multinational corporations outsourcing manufacturing to other countries and willfully remaining ignorant of the processes there, especially when many of these countries do not have the same environmental standards.

The extent to which a company or organization integrates a full understanding of sustainability into its strategy, culture, and leadership will determine its ability to thrive in the future.

**Main Ideas So Far...**

## Key Terms

- **Anthropocentric/Anthropocentrism**  
The view that humans are the centre of the earth.
- **Ecocentric/Ecocentrism:** The view that the earth is the centre. Humans are interconnected to nature
- **Ecological Embeddedness:** a sense of being within and part of ecological systems
- **The Ecological Self:** Our self-awareness to our place in nature. Who we are in relation to nature.
- **Sustainability:** the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources and reducing carbon footprint
- **Sustainability Leadership:** leadership style that responds effectively to social and environmental challenges
- **Systems Thinking:** The understanding of the bigger picture and how smaller actions affect this

- **Worldviews are created through life experiences**
- **Life experiences include:** childhood moments in nature; environmental education; memorable teachers; the belief that capitalism can be a conduit to social change; & a sense of service.
- **Main worldviews are anthropocentric, ecocentric, and the ecological self.**
- **Ecocentrism can be seen through ecological embeddedness, knowing the planet is vulnerable, a belief in the value of nature, systems consciousness, and earth centered circles of identity.**

"As sustainability leaders, it is vitally important that we understand the pervasiveness of anthropocentric worldviews and work on new ways to overcome this social and psychological phenomenon. As part of a new psychology for sustainability, the capacity to cultivate ecocentric worldviews may hold the potential to break through many of the most entrenched psychological barriers to change," (p. 29).



# How Sustainability Leaders Think

Here, Schein explains the history of leadership studies, and gives a brief chronology of the evolution of leadership research. After World War II, researchers wondered what makes great leadership, how successful leaders become who they are, and what the skills and capacities that make them successful are. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main themes were power and control, and therefore much of the examples of such leadership were military figures. Modern leadership theory emerged shortly after. Initially, the focus was on traits, intelligence, and leadership styles. Transactional and transformational theories surfaced focusing on the ability of leaders to motivate employees. These modern theories were coined "great man" theories of leadership. The basis of these theories is the belief that great leaders were born and not cultivated. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a shift in focus on more self-awareness and a wider purpose. The terms 'servant leadership', 'primal leadership', 'authentic leadership' and 'enlightened leadership' were born. Through Schein's research with sustainability leaders, he has determined that the most important competencies for leaders to develop are their psychological and emotional development which include a deeper grasp of their values, motivations, and deeper purpose. He believes sustainability leaders display Servant Leadership, Primal Leadership, and Systems Thinking.

**Servant Leadership.** Sustainability leaders ask themselves "How can I best use myself to serve?". It is less about ego and power and more about stewardship. A former AT&T executive reminisces about reading Robert Greenleaf's theory on servant leadership in business. The former executive said he used to experience severe stress and would push other to their limits. However, once he read about Greenleaf's servant leadership theories, he had an epiphany and started to realize that the real purpose of leadership is about service. He thought more about the impact and consequences of his actions, how to empower those around him, and how to not lead from the top-down.



**Systems Thinking.** This is a holistic approach that views all thinking done within a group or organization creates a link and effect to the other moving parts of the organization. It highlights how members of a group think and interact even at the one-to-one level and how the organization becomes a function of these interactions. Systems thinking, therefore, is an unstated belief system and state of mind that is manifested in the bigger picture. It's a recognition of how our thoughts affect our actions and that there are consequences to those thoughts and actions.

**Emotional Intelligence.** Schein uses emotional intelligence to help students make the connections between emotional intelligence and fundamental motivations for sustainability. Schein quotes Annie McKee as describing how great leaders act firstly as emotional guides. The 2 most notable capacities of emotional intelligence that catalyzes transformational leadership are empathy and self-awareness. Empathy being a deeper understanding of the feelings and existence of the people and species around us, and self-awareness of one's

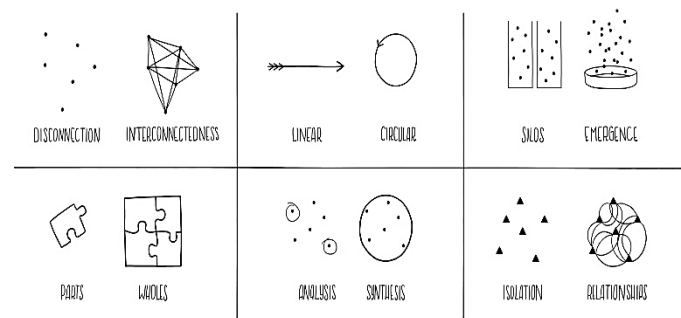
actions, behaviors and effects, and whether it reflects our inner values and integrity. To create deeper passions and convictions leaders must create a shared way of interpreting any given situation especially in chaos (adaptive leadership).

"Servant leadership includes service to all species and the broader ecosystems within which business and our entire way of life exists" (p. 92).

"By using permaculture to teach principles of natural capitalism, business students appear to grasp systems thinking in a deeper way" (p. 93).

"The servant leader is servant first. It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve ... as opposed to wanting power, influence, fame or wealth."  
— Robert K. Greenleaf

## TOOLS OF A SYSTEM THINKER



# Theories of How Sustainability Leaders Develop

Schein uses various theories to describe the levels of development and consciousness of our worldviews. Research shows that each stage of development can only be reached by journeying through an earlier stage. In terms of sustainability, each stage refers to what an individual becomes aware of, reflect on, and act on.

**Pre-Conventional, Conventional, and Post-Conventional Worldviews.** Worldviews also progress through stages from pre to post-conventional. "Worldviews change over time, becoming more complex and encompassing...After decades of research in the areas of cognition, morals, values, ego development, and other facets of human nature, it is clear that there are at least three general stages of development: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Pre-conventional stages are referred to as impulsive, opportunistic and lower levels of psychological maturity. Conventional phases are defined as conformance with social conventions, achieving expertise and efficiency, and short-term economic goals. Post-conventional stages are characterized by reframing problems with a deeper understanding of context, interdependence of systems, and a deeper understanding of environmental and social implications over longer visions.

**Action Logics.** Action logics are descriptions of the stages of development with key features at each stage. These descriptors or logic models, become the frame through which people translate their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions into action. "What differentiates leaders is not so much their philosophy of leadership, their personality or style of management. Rather, it's the internal action logic – how they interpret their surroundings and react when their power or safety is challenged" (p. 101).

"These moments occurred in their early childhoods through their upbringing and role models or by a type of awakening or meaningful encounter as adults," (p. 105)

**Longer Life Spans.** This was an interesting section. Because our average life span is increasing, more people are reaching higher levels of the 'orders of consciousness'. Some people do not reach post-conventional worldviews, however, as people grow older, more tend to reject conventional views such as materialism and short-term profit. Robert Kegan, responsible for this theory, believes this to be an evolutionary process. Therefore, the older we become, the more likely we will reach this consciousness.

## Recent Research on Sustainability Leadership

Oliver Boiral, University of Montreal, reports that literature incorrectly assumes that sustainability leaders share the same values and methods. He concludes that post-conventional worldviews are the most closely

Isabel Rimanoczy did qualitative research on corporate leaders actively involved in sustainability leadership. The majority had a social sensitivity and a personal mission. Each reported specific meaningful, transformative moments in their lives.

Katrina Rogers studied the connection between worldviews and European executives through the lens of the ecological self. She found that execs were able to identify specific moments that led to a different way of thinking about the environment. Their worldviews contained a developed sense of complexity, systems thinking, and interdependence.

## Changing Worldviews

Conventional worldviews	Post-conventional worldviews
Short-term economic goals and maintaining power are highest priorities	More aware of social and environmental implications over longer time-frames
Primarily focused on achieving efficiency when decision-making and interacting	More collaborative, relational and process-oriented when decision-making and interacting
Sees problems and challenges primarily in black-and-white terms	More aware of complexity and interdependence of systems
Maintains loyalty to group; success is defined by organization	More aware of diverse contexts, cultures, worldviews and multiple consequences
Heavily concerned with conformance to group norms and social conventions	More willing to challenge group norms; seeks to transform systems and organizations
Approach to problem-solving primarily using data, logic and scientific rationale	More aware of emotions, unintended consequences; uses intuition
Accepts feedback only from objective sources and superiors	Consistently inquiring and open to feedback from diverse sources





# Spotlight on Ray Anderson~

*Sustainability Leader*

...there is no more strategic issue for a company, or any organization, than its ultimate purpose. For those who think business exists to make a profit, I suggest they think again. Business makes a profit to exist. Surely it must exist for some higher, nobler purpose than that.

— Ray Anderson —

## PROFILE

- Founder & CEO of Interface, world's largest carpet manufacturer
- Known for being progressive and ecologically sustainable

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Decreased costs: \$400 million savings and zero waste with same quality projects
- His sustainability design has attracted and galvanized talented employees with a shared zero impact goal
- The drive for zero waste increased sales more than just pure marketing would
- 20 years ago, 1% of interface's materials came from recycled products. Today it is over 50%. Some carpets are made of 100% recycled materials.
- Company plants trees to offset the impact of miles travelled by air

## Why is Ray Anderson a Sustainability Leader?

**Life Experience.** Anderson had his epiphany after reading "The Ecology of Commerce", by Paul Hawken, whose book proclaims that business and industry is the major culprit of environmental decline, yet the only institution powerful enough to fix the issue.

**Servant Leadership.** Anderson believed we are here to help the earth and make choices to sustain it. "We have a choice to make during our brief visit to this beautiful blue and green living planet: to hurt it or to help it." Ray Anderson.

**A Sense of Interconnectedness.** He knew that a company's and an individual's actions had an impact on the environment around them.

**A Higher Sense of Purpose.** In all his conferences and lectures, he challenged everyone to believe that business has a nobler and higher purpose than just making a profit.

**Post-Conventional Worldview and Higher-Level Consciousness.** He extended his business ecology with further, deeper spirituality by decreasing the importance of affluence and pure wealth, and replacing it with what is necessary to stay happy.

## Ray Anderson's Sustainability Plan by 2020

### *The Seven Fronts of Mount Sustainability*

#### *Closing the Loop*

Redesign processes and products to close the technical loop using recovered and bio-based materials. Interface is redesigning its processes and products to recycle synthetic materials, to convert waste into valuable raw materials, and to keep organic materials uncontaminated so they may be returned to their natural systems.



I always make the business case for sustainability. It's so compelling. Our costs are down, not up. Our products are the best they have ever been. Our people are motivated by a shared higher purpose - esprit de corps to die for. And the goodwill in the marketplace - it's just been astonishing.

Ray Anderson

The status quo is a product of our culture or our culture is a product of the status quo - I'm sure which is the effect and which is the product - there is probably a feedback loop there that is mutually reinforcing. But we have a culture that says "Hey, look around. This place called Earth was created for you and you can do anything you want with it."

Ray Anderson

# The Future of Sustainability Leadership

**“We all have the extraordinary coded within us, waiting to be released ... The ecological crisis is doing what no other crisis in history has ever done—challenging us to a realization of a new humanity.” (p. 135)**

The Collaborator in Chief (with an Ecological Worldview). Sustainability leaders have a positive outlook but the next steps require a new level of collaboration across boundaries and with many industry leaders while cultivating “shared valued initiative.” Collaborative Leadership of Sustainability will see stronger concepts of “leading from the middle”, “influencing without control”, “collective wisdom”, “from fear to trust”, and “away from the typical hierarchical approach”.

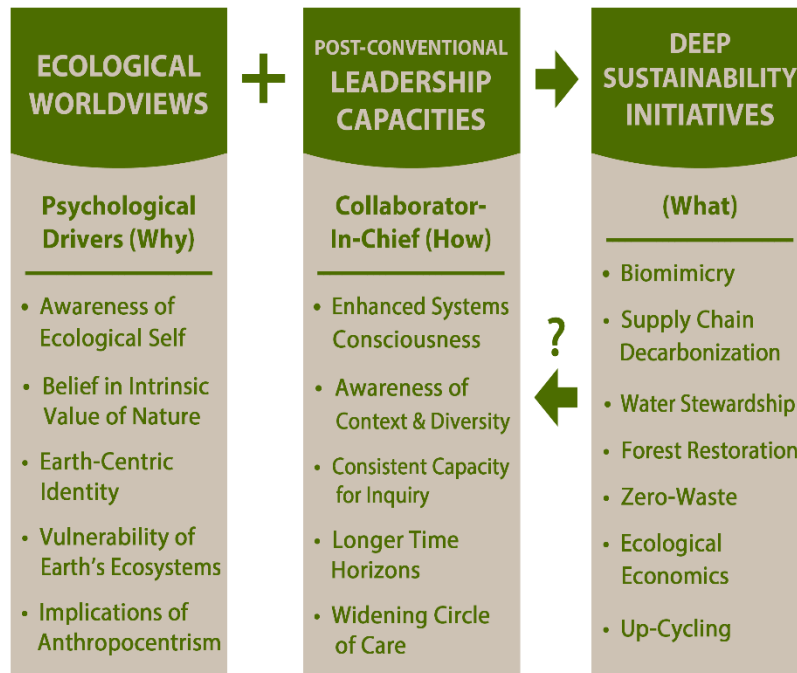
## Steve Schein’s 5 Major Themes Through his Findings

1. Global sustainability leaders have developed definitive ecological worldviews based on specific life experiences.
2. Sustainability Leaders make the connection between their perspectives on the natural world and their work motivations.
3. Their ecological worldviews have evolved over time.
4. Sustainability Leaders possess a high degree of ecological intelligence and emotional intelligence, with well-developed empathy and self-awareness.
5. They all have post-conventional worldviews that show how sustainability leaders think about their role as transformational vehicles. They are aware that this worldview shapes their leadership, collaboration, and communication.

“I think sustainability has caused leadership to evolve within our company. When I joined the company, the culture was really about seniority. Now it is more about leading from the middle. With 300,000 people there really is no other way. It would take a year to get the word out on our initiatives. You would be a dinosaur. With my old jobs around change management and diversity it makes it really difficult. What we do in the corporate function is very much trying to influence without control.” (p. 139)

“What I began to experiment with was the change from fear to trust. Trust is a much more powerful tool than fear. Servant leadership is a term that’s been over-used now for many years but that’s basically where it came from. Also, what I saw was a democratization of companies in the mid- to late ’90s, away from the typical hierarchical approach that comes from the military, where an officer’s idea is better than yours because he outranks you. Good people started to realize that they don’t have to put up with that crap.” (p. 139)

## The Hidden Power of Ecological Worldviews





“The green movement is not a movement to save nature, but actually a movement to save the human race.” (p. 37)



**Book Club  
Questions/Questions  
for Discussion**

If this is a growing movement, why does it seem most business leaders have conventional worldviews?

What are the worldviews of other leaders?

What stops other types of leaders from becoming Sustainability Leaders with post-conventional worldviews?

Do all people who have ecologically or environmentally significant life experiences progress through stages of consciousness?

What are the fears leaders experience that stop them from becoming servant leaders, or collaborators in chief?

What types of corporate workshops will accelerate the development of the ecological self and post-conventional worldviews?

How do ecological worldviews vary across demographics of age, gender, culture, and gender?

**Schein’s Suggestions ...**

- Integrate ecosciences in business curriculum
- Reflective journaling and eco-biography exercises to reflect on and create eco-life experiences
- Scaffold life experiences to create the consciousness evolution
- Corporate workshops to support the ecological self
- More public focus on corporate sustainability leaders
- Integrate developmental psychology in sustainability curriculum
- Corporate initiatives and supports in narrowing the gap between thought and action

**Final Thoughts...**

**Summary:** Schein’s own experiences mirror those of sustainability leaders as he begins by introducing his own life experiences that impact his evolution of the ecological self. His initial experience lecturing about sustainability began with a list of new green initiatives but they lacked a face – an ethos. So, Schein sets out to research sustainability leaders and who they are. Schein wanted to dispel the myth that green initiatives and sustainability were not just marketing ploys. He interviewed 75 sustainability leaders and executives and discovered similar perceptions, worldviews, strengths, sense of ecological self, and life experiences. The 3 main aspects of sustainability leaders’ beliefs are servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and a systems intelligence.

developmental psychology as foundations of self-awareness and the stages of achieving higher level consciousness. The examples from executives come in short clips. Overall, the book resembles a textbook you would find in a psychology class rather than a novel or self-help book. However, this academic presentation of sustainability leadership may help give the field validity as it is relatively new. Hopefully, this will propel more focus on sustainability leadership and give it traction in post-secondary studies and business development.

Although I enjoyed the academic and research perspective on sustainability research, I cannot say I was inspired nor did my cynicism reduce. However, this was not Schein’s aim, which instead was to inform and defend the study of sustainability leaders.

I chose this book because I have been longing to discover more green companies and stories of inspiration from ecologically ethical corporations. I wanted to dispel some of my cynicism towards the corporate world and their pervasive, short-term, profit driven agendas.

Schein presents a positive view of sustainability leadership but does admit that it is a frustrating battle at times. His theories are based on empirical and qualitative research. He relies heavily on



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