

# **A New Bottom Line**

**The Ethics of Profitability Through  
Environmental Sustainability**



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The Ethics of Profitability through  
Environmental Sustainability**

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*To my Mom and Dad, who inspired my lifelong love of Nature.*

**-Aaron Hull**

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“No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.”  
-*Albert Einstein*

## **Introduction**



Born and raised in the coastal redwoods and beaches of Central California, I developed a spiritual connection to natural ecosystems at an early age. I strive to live a life dedicated to the conservation of natural systems and committed to the values of environmental sustainability.

Paddling my thirteen foot ocean kayak nearly a mile off the coast of Santa Cruz, California, I find myself in awe of the immense size of the Monterey Bay sanctuary and the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. At times, huge flocks of shearwaters, numbering in the hundreds of thousands darken the sun from the sky. The birds dive at a frenzied pace, feeding relentlessly on the millions of sardines and anchovies that school beneath the bay’s emerald waters. The sheer numbers of birds and their prey appear incalculable.

Scenes like this give some indication of how an immense ecosystem like the Monterey Bay could lead business leaders and policy makers of the last century to assume that Earth’s resources were inexhaustible. “For most of humankind’s experience on Earth, ecosystem capital was available in sufficient abundance, and human activities were sufficiently limited, that it was reasonable to think of ecosystem service as free.” (Daily, Eillison, 7) The ecosystem was viewed in terms of maximum yields in material production and because the service was free, the standard of business success was short-term financial gain, regardless of the long-term consequences to the ecosystem.

Similarly, business decision making processes focused primarily on quantitative rather than qualitative standards of effectiveness. In many cases, communication practices regarding the management of natural resources were unilateral and/or adversarial. As University of California Santa Cruz Professor of Economics John Isbister posits, “Up until very recently there was no consciousness that we were eating the seed corn. That economic activity could degrade the environment, just wasn’t part of anybody’s consciousness...It took a while before economists and business leaders began to realize that the environment was important to them.” (Isbister) Business practices based on short-term profits and anthropocentric views of the moral community have proven catastrophic to the health of Earth’s ecosystems as well as the long-term profitability of businesses.



Monterey’s Cannery row, for example, supported eighteen canneries during its heyday in the 1940’s. The seemingly inexhaustible sardine fishery was harvested without regulation until overfishing wiped out the industry in 1947. The view that the value of the fishery was measured solely by annual yields and maximum harvest rates, rather than viewing the sardine as an integral part of the ecosystem, largely contributed to the fisheries demise.

Communication between the cannery’s management and the scientific community was largely adversarial and pitted cannery bosses against scientists and federal regulators. Had such communication processes been cooperative, scientific reports of climate changes and predicted sustainable harvests could have informed the decision making process. Not only would the ecosystem have benefited from such an informed

deliberative process, but the industry would have ensured its survival and long-term profitability.

Unfortunately, the catastrophic consequences of adversarial communication climates and short-sighted, self-interest based business models, evidenced by the Cannery Row failure, are not atypical. Though regulation and issues of survivability have pushed environmental concern to the forefront of business ethics in the last decade, business continues to value natural resources in terms of raw materials rather than the value of the living ecosystem. Though the ethical principles of environmental sustainability and the premise that living systems have intrinsic value is not new, these values have only been readily applied to the deliberative processes of modern business since the early 1990's. This changing consciousness marks a major paradigm shift in the way businesses view earth's ecosystems and the deliberative community. According to California State University Monterey Bay Earth Systems Science and Policy professor David Takacs, "Ultimately, a sustainable future requires a paradigm shift in values. You need everyone to see that our 'self-interest' is based upon a more expansive sense of self, where self includes everything around us – human and nonhuman stakeholders and the systems that sustain them." (Takacs)

The scientific evidence that business were operating beyond the limits of what nature could sustain were made available at the beginning of the twenty-first century, yet many businesses continue to operate with the same value assumptions. "As Stanford University biologist Peter Vitousek has said, 'we're the first generation with tools to understand changes in the earth's system caused by human activity, and the last with the opportunity to influence the course of many of the changes now under way.'" (Daily, Ellison, 8)

This shift in the consciousness marks a significant change in the way business leaders view the deliberative community. Rather than viewing community members as adversaries, they are benefiting from the inexhaustible wealth of knowledge that can be gained by cooperating with the community. Along with the realization that environmental sustainability is imperative to ensuring the health of Earth's ecosystems, business leaders are also finding that the communication and "value added" view of living ecosystems is simply good business. As Dawn Rittenhouse, DuPont's director of sustainable development maintains, "The challenge in sustainable development is to do the right thing in a way that makes business sense. Doing things to improve the situation will make your business stronger." (Watkins, 21) In short, businesses are discovering there is far more money to be made by working with the entire moral community to ensure long-term profitability through environmental sustainability

This research project will explore the issues at the forefront of this paradigm shift. It will document communication practices and philosophical frameworks that effectively incorporate profitability and environmental sustainability. It will examine the viewpoints of the members of the moral community and ethical frameworks, applied within the context of forestry management. The project will detail the communication practices and applied theoretical frameworks informing the decision making process of a forestry management case in Santa Cruz County. In order to establish the ways in which communication practices and applied ethical theories have proven successful in recognizing the full value of natural systems and the potential profits in protecting them, this project will address the central question of: What communication practices and philosophical theories inform and contribute to the implementation of forestry management decisions that are both profitable and environmentally sustainable?



## The Ethics of Sustainability

“We have not inherited the world from our forefathers – we have borrowed it from our children.”

*-Kashmiri proverb*



The concept of sustainability is not a new one.

“Rather than being a radically new idea, it is an old philosophy that is being revived to cope with new problems. It says that care for the environment is essential to economic progress; that the natural resources of our planet are the base of all agriculture and industry; and that only by sustaining that base can we sustain human development.” (Peterson, 6)

Many of these key tenets have been evident in Native

American traditions, including those of the Sioux and Pawnee

Nations, which predate modern environmental ethics by

several thousand years. The Native American tradition of the seventh generation

“requires those who would use scarce resources to consider their actions from the perspective of those seven generations from themselves.” (Newton, 1) This value places the importance of the consequences of ethical decisions not on individual benefit, but on the benefit of future generations of humans and the natural world. In applying this framework to the modern business context, it would mean that businesses have a moral obligation to utilize natural resources in a way that will not detract from the future – the seventh generation’s – ability to derive the same benefits from the environment.

Along with moral duty to preserve natural resources for future generations, sustainability entails thorough consideration of the consequences of a particular policy or practice on the health of Earth’s ecosystems. Though this does require consideration for the consequences on human happiness, sustainability also encompasses minimizing the

harm to the environment as a means of ensuring the happiness of future generations of human and non-human animals. This consideration of the entire ecosystem is an extension of traditional consequentialism in that it places distinct value on entire ecosystems in and of themselves, rather than their usefulness to humans alone. “Such criterion would suggest that all living organisms – plants, insects, and bacteria – should be directly taken into account when analyzing ethical problems.” (Palmer, 14) Setting sustainable development as a standard of effectiveness marks a new way of looking at an old economic system that diminishes the future value of “natural capital” ensuring the future value of Earth’s profitability and utility to future generations. As UCSC professor John Isbister pointed out in a recent interview, “Sustainability is essential. At the very least we should not harm those of future generations. Ethically, this seems a fairly easy proposition to arrive at, that we should bequeath people in the future a natural environment as good as the one we receive.” (Isbister)

This means of considering the consequences of ethical decisions marks a distinct shift in values from the ethical models of business since the industrial revolution, which valued natural resources only in terms of their utility to promote relatively short term human happiness. “Brad Allenby, AT&T’s chief environmental officer, has observed: ‘The industrial revolution was all Nike: ‘Just do it’. Sustainable development adds another dimension: ‘Should we do it.’” (Hawken, 3)

## Redefining the Moral Community

“Among the scenes which are deeply impressed on my mind, none exceed in sublimity the primeval forests undefaced by the hand of man...no one can stand in these solitudes unmoved, and not feel that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body.”

*-Charles Darwin*



The redefining of the moral community to include non-human animals as well as ecological systems like watersheds and wetlands, integral to sustainable development, is also an application of ancient value systems.

Buddhist ethics, for example, have always encompassed all living things within their moral community – not simply members of their own culture or species. According to the Dalai Lama, “The natural world is our home. It is not necessarily sacred or holy, it is simply where we live. It is therefore in our interest to look after it.” (Dalai Lama, 188)

This universal view values nature as being integral to human existence, and views humans as being part of the ecosystem rather than having power over it.

This view of the moral community as including nonhuman organisms was also shared by many Native American tribes. “The Pawnee Indians, for example, address ‘all of life as a ‘thou’ – the trees the stones.’ All beings were seen as objects of reverence and value. While the Pawnee recognize that it may be necessary to kill living beings for one’s own survival, this must be done with respect and only when necessary. Other animals are not a resource for humans but co-dwellers.” (Boss, 120)

Similarly, some modern, deep ecologists maintain an “ecocentric” view, emphasizing the rights of nature above those of human interests. From this perspective

the term natural resources is itself offensive. “Others view the Earth as a living organism and question the relative importance of the survival of the human species when compared to the survival of the planet.”(Peterson, 9)

The key ethical tenet framing these philosophies is the value of living in harmony with the environment rather than having power *over* the environment. This view maintains that human beings are an integral part of earth’s ecosystems. The assumption that our existence is dependent on this relationship marks a restructuring in the ethical model of how businesses relate to natural systems. According to ecological economist Herman Daly, this restructuring of business standards of ethical effectiveness is a

“...shift in our vision of how the economic activities of human beings are related to the natural world... This change in vision is replacing the economic norm of quantitative expansion (growth) with that of qualitative improvement (development) as the path of future progress. This shift is resisted by most economic and political institutions, which are founded on traditional quantitative growth and fear its replacement by something as subtle and challenging as qualitative development.” (Hawken, 23)

This change in the “vision” of what defines economic norms of successes places the goal of quality, not quantity as the standard. This vision would promote development that did not compromise the quality of natural systems in an effort to increase the quantity of materials extracted from or imposed upon Earth’s ecosystems. The standards of gauging business effectiveness based on quantity, gross product or unit production for example would be replaced or modified to include a new “bottom line” that gauges the business’ ability to improve or refrain from compromising environmental quality.

Another dimension in determining the “qualitative improvement; of economic institutions is the extent that their decisions consider the interest of all members of the moral community. Throughout the industrial revolution, only the interests of humans, at times only white males, were considered when determining the “rightness” of a particular

policy or practice. However, several contemporary ethical theorists contend that “we must extend the moral principal of ‘equal consideration of interests’ to include the interest of nonhumans”. (Shaw, 175) According to Princeton University professor of bioethics, Peter Singer, “...the effects of our actions on nonhuman animals could be taken into account in two quite different ways: directly, giving the lives and welfare of nonhuman animals an intrinsic significance which must count in nay moral calculation; or directly, so that the effects of our actions on nonhumans are morally significant only if they have consequences for humans...” (Shaw, 176)

Extending moral consideration to include the “intrinsic significance of nonhuman animals”, Singer argues, recognizes that all beings with the capacity for subjective experience have a “necessary and a sufficient condition for having interest.”(Shaw, 177) Applying this principle to business ethics would entail considering the interest of nonhuman animals in their own right rather than how their condition affects human interest. “If we are interested in sustainable development, we must develop an ethic of care toward human, as well as non-human systems that sustain humans, which are interrelated.” (Takacs) Viewing nonhuman animals as having intrinsic value can also become an integral component in assessing the “natural capital” of an ecosystem and how the consequences of ethical business decisions might affect an ecosystem’s nonhuman inhabitants.

Other theorists argue that the interests of entire natural systems must be taken into account. Professor of law Christopher D. Stone argues that environmental systems should have legal standing rights. Extending legal rights to encompass natural systems, like forests and watersheds, follows the same logic as extending legal rights to “Blacks in the slave South” (Shaw 191) or voting rights for women.

“The fact is, that each time there is a movement to confer rights on some ‘new entity’, the proposal is bound to sound odd or frightening or laughable. This is partly because until the rightless thing receives its rights, we cannot see it as anything but a *thing* for the use of ‘us’ – those who are holding rights at the time.” (Shaw, 191)

Stone goes on to argue that implementation of these rights would entail awarding judgments on behalf of natural system rather than solely to individuals affected by damages to the environment. Businesses that pollute or damage a natural object would be forced to “make it whole.” (Shaw, 193) “The cost of making a forest whole, for example, would include the cost of reseeded, repairing watersheds, restocking wildlife – the sorts of costs the Forest Service undergoes after a fire.” (Saw, 192) In this way, businesses would also be held accountable for the consequences of its practices on the natural object in the same way it would the human pollution dependent upon that object.

Similarly, University of Wisconsin professor of philosophy, J. Baird Callicott, rejects traditional human-centered approaches to environmental ethics, placing an emphasis on the rights of natural ecosystems. Callicott maintains that, “From an evolutionary-ecological point of view, we are ‘kin’ to the fellow members of the biotic community. Our actions in respect to these fellow members should somehow be directly morally accountable, and the integrity of this community per se, the health of the planetary organism, should somehow be of direct moral concern...” (Shaw, 202)

As members of an interrelated / interdependent system we have a moral obligation to respect the intrinsic value of natural systems. Callicott also maintains that natural systems should be approached with, “respect for wholes, for the community as such and its various subsystem...” (Shaw, 206) This way of viewing ecosystems as a whole takes into account the rights of, and potential consequences to the entire community and each of its interdependent members, human and non human alike.

## Improving Communication Quality

“[The] quality of our communication affects the quality of our communities.”

-James A. Mackin



Unlike the uninformed, unilateral, and adversarial deliberation processes characteristic of economic decision making during the industrial revolution, the implementation of morally responsible, sustainable development

requires communication practices that consider the entire deliberative community. “If we are going to solve pressing environmental problems that confront humans and the Earth, we need the perspectives of the general public and all academic fields of study to engage them.” (Takacs) Considering the rights, responsibilities and the potential consequences affecting each member of the deliberative community will insure the most equitable and mutually inclusive deliberative process.

In the case of forestry management, for example, the decision makers should consider the viewpoints of the deliberative community, including; employees, local residents, environmental scientists, stock holders, the ecosystem and all its nonhuman inhabitants, as well as future generations of all community members affected by the decision.

By improving communication practices to include the entire moral community, decision makers promote a system of interdependence based on cooperation rather than

competition. “Because we live in an increasingly interdependent world, our capacity to build lasting and meaningful relations across differences has the potential to play a significant role in our well-being and in the well-being of others.” (Makau, Marty, 45-6)

Rather than viewing the scientific community as an adversary, intent on limiting quantitative development, businesses are beginning to realize that the wealth of information environmental science provides can improve both the quality and long term profitability, of their decisions. According to environmental economist Carl Frankel, the implementation of this emerging environmental communications ethos has brought business to,

“...the quite practical realization that collaboration is an effective, efficient way to address environmental issues. Business executives are beginning to realize that whereas conflict drains resources, pooling resources creates synergies. For instance, when a company and an environmental group join forces, the business gains access to scientific and technical expertise that it may not possess in-house, while the advocacy group gets the benefits of tough bottom-line thinking.” (Frankel, 66)

Businesses are beginning to incorporate cooperative, rather than competitive deliberative practices, transforming former adversaries into allies. This shift in communication practices has the potential to foster “win-win” outcomes rather than “win-lose” or “winner-take-all”. Cooperative argumentation between the entire deliberative community, including advocacy for nonhuman members, encourages a pooling of resources, establishes common goals and sets the stage for understanding and compromise. “Members in these groups form moral communities, willing and able to share the goal of reaching the best decision possible given their circumstances.” (Makau, Marty, 97) Rather than stonewalling or using competitive deliberative practices to address new environmental issues, businesses are finding that there is much to be gained from working with the community.



The shared goal of sustainability has become a cohesive element in fostering a shared sense of purpose between business leaders and the community. “Sustainable development ‘is still a concept where we need to learn a great deal from each other, one which is ideally suited toward working in partnership with other people,’ says Terry F. Yosie, Vice President for the American Chemistry Council.” (Watkins, 16)

Historically, where rivalries between businesses, environmentalists and local communities existed, the quality of the environment and the long-term profitability of decisions affecting Earth’s ecosystems have suffered. Deliberation based on the principle of interdependence has proven to have distinct advantages to decision makers in business. Multi-stakeholder deliberative processes are simply more effective ways of doing business:

- *“Business benefits* (help meet the increasing expectations of existing customers and win new business: assist in identifying efficiencies and cost savings, and in reducing future environmental liabilities; allow for easier access to capital/investment markets)
- *Improved Performance* (encourages measurement, collection and collation of data to be put into a more manageable form, providing better management information; strengthens management systems and processes and ensures that procedures are based on good management practice; motivates employees and others on whom your business depends; encourages continuous improvement)
- *Enhanced Reputation* (Helps maintain the confidence of different audiences and your “license to operate; “responds to shareholder and public concerns; provides tangible evidence of your environmental commitment; gives credibility to your contributions to the public debate).” (Frankel, 75)

In addition to improving the quality of business policy and practice, communication based on the principle of interdependence, gives voice to than important member of the community, historically left out of the deliberative process – the non-human members of the moral community. For businesses to adopt sustainable development, the affect of their decisions must take into account the long-term consequences to the health of Earth’s ecosystems, including non-human plants and animals.

Business leaders have traditionally argued that since non-human plants and animals cannot speak, they could not possibly represent themselves in the deliberative process. However, business leaders are beginning to realize that there are voices in the human community qualified to speak on their behalf. Environmental scientists, conservation advocates and lawyers can all voice the positions of non-human stakeholders. As law Professor Christopher D. Stone argues, “It is no answer to say that streams and forests cannot have standing because streams and forests cannot speak. Corporations cannot speak either; nor can states, estates, infants, incompetents, municipalities, or universities. Lawyers speak for them as the customarily do for the ordinary citizen with legal problems.” (Shaw, 192) Including non-human members of the moral community demonstrates power with, not power over, the environment and takes into account the consequences of decisions on the well being of Earth’s ecosystems.

With a shared goal of sustainability, businesses are beginning to approach the deliberative process with a new standard of effectiveness. Rather than setting a goal of having their interests “win” at the expense of the environment and /or the community, businesses implementing cooperative deliberation promote a “win-win” standard of effective decision making. The realization that all stakeholders have a shared interest in ensuring the long term health of Earth’s ecosystems sets the stage for a deliberative process based on the principle of interdependence. The shared goal of what constitutes effective and ethical dialogue, stands to improve the quality of communication and the environment. “As James A. Mackin asserts, the ‘quality of our communication effects the quality of our communities.’” (cited in, Makau, Marty, 83)

## Recognizing Natural Capital in Santa Cruz Redwoods

“Nature’s first green is gold.”

- *Robert Frost*



A case illustrating how cooperative deliberation practices and the ethics of sustainability might be applied to recognize the full value of a natural system and improve the quality of the community, was recently documented in the forestry management of a redwood forest ecosystem in Santa Cruz County, California.

The decision to end commercial logging on the 3880 acres of forests around Loch Lomond, Zayante Creek and Laguna Creek was the result of a deliberative process that considered the consequences of continued logging on the entire moral community. Testimony from twenty-five local residents, logging industry representatives, environmental consultants (including wildlife biologists and hydrologists) and County appointed lawyers all contributed to the deliberative process. Rather than viewing the standpoints of local residents and the scientific community as adversaries to a logging program which could potentially contribute millions in revenue to the County’s water department, the Santa Cruz City Council took into account the long-term consequences of commercial logging to the health of the local residents, the watershed, and the habitat.

Unlike traditional forestry models that focus on the forest in terms of its utility to humans, the City Council decided to be “guided by the principle of ‘multiple use,’ which included timber harvest, recreation, watershed and wildlife habitat.” (Herbert, 3)



The council considered the health of the community as an interdependent system, rather than viewing the individual parts as having greater utility. The council weighted the potential profits from harvesting old-growth trees from watershed lands

with the potential damage to and future cost of restoring the forest's natural capital, generated by: carbon consumption, natural waste processing, erosion control, eco-tourism, and wildlife habitation.

The council also implemented the policy based on the ethical principle of sustainability. Rather than accept the short term economic goals proposed by logging industry representatives, the Council's decision was aimed at ensuring the long-term profitability of the community through promoting qualitative, not quantitative standards of effectiveness. For example, after considering a logging industry proposal to selective harvest and replant fast-growing tree species, the Council decided on a "no logging policy based on the potentially harmful long term consequences of this logging procedure to the Redwood forest ecosystem. "Tree farming", the practice of obtaining pulp timber from wide tracts of fast-growing trees that are cut and pulped at maturity, is not sustainable; all the nutrients that entered the trees from the soil are carted off and carried away, and the soil is too thin to grow anything after three or four crops." (Newton, 6)

Mitch Swanson, lead consultant for Swanson Hydrology, also contributed his team's findings from a two year study of the ecosystem to the deliberative process. According to the study, "Commercial logging by the water department over the past 30 years has removed most of the old growth trees, which are necessary to stabilize stream banks. The study also stated that clear cutting of redwoods, tan oaks and madrones has

increased fire danger and growth of invasive plant species, such as Scotch broom.”

(Herbert, 3)

Along with considering the sustained well being of the environment, the decision makers in this case also factored the consequences of reducing the ecosystems ability to naturally purify water into the cost/benefit equation, affecting an ever increasing human population.

“The loss of natural water purification services is just now sneaking up on many urban communities, especially those that take their water from uplands where, until recently, people were few and their activities not terribly disruptive. The rapid growth of urban sprawl in such places has worsened water pollution, making those who live downstream take a hard second look at the value of keeping that upstream land as natural as possible.” (Daily, Ellison, 64)

The council heeded local environmentalist’s appeal to common sense economics. It would simply cost the county far more to build a water treatment plant than it stood to gain from the sale for timber. ““Stopping logging would be the first logical step for any option to protect water quality’, said Tom Harvey, a resident of Boulder Creek.”

(Herbert, 3)

The Council also considered the impact of a logging campaign on Santa Cruz County’s multi-million dollar tourism industry. Outdoor enthusiasts and local business owners posit that the forest and watershed areas draw thousands of hikers, mountain bikers, anglers and sightseers each year, providing a considerable boost to the local economy.

Further, some argue that natural systems have intrinsic value that transcends its economic utility to human beings. The forest ecosystem in the Santa Cruz uplands is home to hundreds of native plant and animal species. The lakes and streams, kept clear by the forest’s root systems, are the native spawning grounds of a threatened salmon and

steelhead fishery. Clearly, the affects of continued logging would have a direct impact on the fragile, nonhuman community.

In acknowledging the potential consequences of their decision to discontinue commercial logging in the Santa Cruz watershed lands, the Santa Cruz City Council made a decision based on sustainable, qualitative development. Their decision making process demonstrated an ethos of interdependence and acknowledged the full value of the natural forest ecosystem. By engaging in cooperative dialogue between stakeholders, decision makers turned rivals into resources, with the shared goal of making the most ethical and effective decision. The Santa Cruz City Council employed six management techniques *Water Environment and Technology* staff writers Johnson, Kaunelis and Cave propose as the most effective means of watershed management communication.

- “Understanding the concerns of local communities;
- Defining smaller areas for better collaboration;
- Clearly defining goals;
- Describing problems and environmental needs rather than prescribing solutions;
- And sharing results with the public and elected officials.” (Cave, Johnson, Kaunelis, 33)

Rather than choosing the short term profitability of tree farming, the Santa Cruz City council instituted a “no logging” policy that will conserve the natural capital of its watershed forests for future generations of human and nonhuman beneficiaries.

“Under the general name of Commodity, I rank all those advantages which our senses owe to nature. This, of course, is a benefit which is temporary and mediate, not ultimate, like its service to the soul. Yet although low, it is perfect in kind, and is the only use of nature which all men apprehend.”

*-Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## Conclusion



The recent trend within the business community to adopt sustainable development as a goal and engage in cooperative deliberation, with the entire moral community, marks a radical paradigm shift from business models of the industrial revolution. “Business and municipalities are starting to realize that recognizing natural capital can save money in the long run, so it’s a win-win situation for human health, tax payers and the natural world.” (Takacs) This change in consciousness involves gauging business success by new standards of effectiveness. Rather than viewing “the bottom line” in terms of short-term, quantitative goals, businesses are discovering there is more to be gained from long-term, qualitative approaches to gauging success.

“However there are still enormous challenges. Extrapolation of current trends paints a picture of an unsustainable world: an increasing gap between the rich and the poor; billions of people who do not have access to clean water, proper sanitation, adequate food, shelter, and health care; and the steady decline of key global ecosystems.”

(Watkins, 16) There is clearly more work to be done if sustainability and the communication processes that foster cooperation are to become standard operating procedure.

As evidenced by the case of forestry and watershed management in Santa Cruz County, policymakers are more likely to make effective decisions when they establish dialogues between stakeholders in the entire moral community. Considering the consequences of decisions on the entire moral community, including nonhuman animals, is imperative in implementing morally responsible and sustainable policy making. Cooperative deliberation transforms adversaries into allies and establishes a communication framework resulting in effective decision making.

Setting a standard of cooperative deliberation transforms competitive, “win-lose” business models into “win-win” outcomes. No longer do businesses have to choose between profitability and the environment, nor must they approach stakeholders as “us versus them”. By considering the consequences of their decisions on the entire moral community, setting a standard of sustainable development and practicing cooperative deliberation, decision makers make the most effective long-term decisions.

Fostering cooperative communication practices can improve the quality of the environment, by recognizing the interdependence of community members and Earth’s fragile ecosystems. Setting a standard of effectiveness on qualitative, long-term sustainability recognizes the full value of Earth’s natural resources and the potential profitability of conserving them. Valuing the health of future generations of humans, nonhumans and the systems that sustain them is vital to our survival and should therefore form the basis for our economic system. In doing so, businesses can benefit from working together with the entire moral community, establishing the common goal of a sustainable future.



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# Senior Capstone Research Prospectus

## **I. A New Bottom Line: The Ethics of Profitability Through Environmental Sustainability**

This in-depth research paper will explore and apply ethical theories concerning profitability and environmental sustainability. Applying specific ethical frameworks to a case study will demonstrate ways in which ethical policies and practices have proven both economically sound and environmentally sustainable.

This project will detail the ways in which a local case study involving forestry management, natural waste disposal systems, and watershed management in Santa Cruz County has implemented ethical practices that recognize the full value of natural systems and the potential profits in protecting them.

In applying ethical frameworks, this project will take into account the potential effects of such practices on the entire moral community, as well as the long-term consequences to the health of Earth's ecosystems.

This project is intended to inform academic and business communities concerning new ways to apply ethical principles in their business practices. The project is also intended to establish a basis for cooperative argumentation between the business community and environmental advocates. It will inform the audience the ways in which ethical theories can be applied to business strategies that are both profitable and environmentally sustainable. Finally, it will demonstrate the student's ability to apply ethical frameworks to environmentally sensitive issues, to potential employers.

## **II. Major Learning Outcomes and Criteria**

### **MLO1: Critical Communication Skills**

This project will demonstrate the student's ability to think critically and empathically, through applying theoretical frameworks to real world case studies. The student will demonstrate this ability in both written and oral contexts.

### **MLO2: Research Skills**

This project will demonstrate the student's ability to acquire, evaluate, interpret, synthesize, apply, document, and present knowledge gained through diverse and appropriate methods of inquiry in the context of an analytical research paper.

### **MLO 4: Philosophical Analysis**

This project will demonstrate the student's ability to understand why and who beliefs, values and assumptions interact by detailing and applying philosophical models to ethical issues.

## **III. Research Questions**

- What communication practices and philosophical theories inform and contribute to the implementation of forestry management decisions that are both profitable and environmentally sustainable?
- How has a shift in consciousness affected the way business leaders view the environment?
- What are the key ethical tenets of sustainability?
- How does the ethical theory of profitability through environmental sustainability define the moral community?
- How is the moral community defined according to an ecocentric approach to profitability through environmental sustainability?

- How is the moral community defined according to an anthropocentric approach to profitability through environmental sustainability?
- How have deliberative processes and standards of ethical effectiveness changed since the industrial revolution?
- What communication practices most affectively consider the entire moral community, and their long-term impact on Earth's ecosystems?
- What communication and ethical frameworks, applied to a Santa Cruz County forestry management case study, have resulted in an outcome that is both profitable and environmentally sustainable?

#### IV. Sources Cited

##### Primary Sources

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Stead, Edward, Stead, Jean Garner. "Eco-Enterprise Strategy: Standing for Sustainability." *Journal of Business Ethics*. v24 i4 p313. April 15, 2000.

##### Secondary Sources

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Boss, Judith A.. *Ethics For Life*. Mayfield Publishing Company. Mountain View, California. 1998.

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- Makau, Josina M., Marty, Debi L.. *Cooperative Argumentation*. Waveland Press. Prospect Heights, Illinois. 2001.
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- Peterson, Tarla Rai. *Sharing the Earth: The Rhetoric of Sustainable Development*. University of South Carolina Press. Columbia, South Carolina. 1997.
- University of Ontario. "Ethics and Sustainability". On-line Report. <http://publish.uwa.ca/~barmstro/Ethics%20and%20Sustainability.html>
- Wann, David. *Bio Logic: Designing With Nature to Protect the Environment*. Jhonson Printing Company. Boulder, Colorado. 1994.

## **V. Research Plan**

With my initial primary and secondary sources compiled, I will search for additional web resources that include images and current information, both primary and secondary, that will contribute diverse perspectives regarding my case study of a local environmental issue concerning the ethics of sustainability. I will also continue networking to develop leads for interviews.

## **VI. Form of Capstone Project**

This project will be an in-depth research paper accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation with images. Prior Coursework involving: research methods,

cooperative argumentation, philosophies of ethics, and application of ethical theories to real-world ethical issues in my HCOM 312, 301, 352, and 403 classes have provided me the requisite skills to develop this paper and presentation.

#### **VII. Research Challenges/Questions**

Adding interviews with diverse perspectives on the local case study could improve the project. I have connections with some of the faculty at UCSC that may be knowledgeable on the topic, through my father. Should I try to schedule appointments with them, or will I run out of time? Should I focus on using the resources I already have?

#### **VIII. Archiving the Project**

I plan on archiving my capstone project with the CSUMB library.

## **Reflection**

Though the Capstone process intimidated me in the initial stages, once I started the writing process and focused on each individual section, the project began to come together. As my writing progressed, I found that the research I conducted prior to the class was extremely beneficial and formed the foundation for further inquiry.

The most challenging aspect of the project was organizing and limiting the scope of the paper. As I gathered my research, I realized that the philosophical and communication models my project explores engage many different fields of study and apply to many case studies. I narrowed the focus of the paper to one specific case study, making it possible to complete the project within the time permitted.

I feel like this project merely scratches the surface of an exciting paradigm shift in environmental and communication ethics that merits more comprehensive study.

Expanding the scope of this project to include more case studies and interviews with stakeholders could potentially shed light on other creative solutions to environmental problems and perspectives of deliberative communities.

I realize how important my interdisciplinary education in the Department of Human Communications at CSUMB has been to the development of this project. The Capstone has given me a means of demonstrating the diverse skills I have developed over the past two years.

When you are as passionate about a topic as I am for environmental sustainability and cooperative deliberation, it seems like your work is never complete. However, I am excited about the prospect of a sustainable future and I am proud that my work makes a small contribution to this imperative shift in consciousness.