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Navigating Sustainability Through Institutional Change:

Consolidating and Expanding the debate

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Abstract

Sustainability has become a crucial topic of discussion in both academia and practice. One perspective for understanding sustainability is through the lens of institutional change, which emphasises the need to transform norms, values, and practices to fully embrace sustainability. This review article contributes to the ongoing scholarly discourse by synthesising current literature at the intersection of institutional change and sustainability. Utilising a systematic approach, a total of 108 articles were analysed. The review provides a comprehensive understanding of the discourse and categorises existing knowledge into four key themes: triggers for change, change agents, methods for change, and resulting outcomes. This reveals the multifaceted nature of sustainability attainment through institutional change. Additionally, the review introduces four distinct institutional change models that explore change by considering the interaction between existing institutions and new sustainable institutions during the change process. This highlights the role of the existing institutional framework and the complexity of achieving sustainability. Finally, the review identifies research gaps and suggests future directions for further research in this field.

Keywords Institutional change; Sustainability; Systematic literature review; Institutional change models

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Introduction

In the face of pressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty and income inequality, achieving sustainability has emerged as an imperative goal for societies worldwide (Böhm et al., 2022; George et al., 2016). Sustainability despite not having a definitive definition has been commonly addressed as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 2023; WCED, 1987). It encompasses a diverse and myriad of issues that can be collectively grouped under three dimensions, environmental, social, and economic (United Nations, 2023). In response to these issues the world has experienced the emergence of several initiatives that aim to provide solutions such as environmental preservations initiatives, gender equality programs and sustainable investments (Böhm et al., 2022; Dordi & Palaschuk, 2022).

Achieving sustainable development necessitates more than individual actions or sporadic policy adjustments; it demands a profound change in institutions, which are established structures, norms, rules, and practices that shape our environment societies, and economies (George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022). There is a burgeoning body of literature from scholars across several disciplines in management field that have sought to understand the multiple facets of sustainability using institutional change as a suitable lens in their analysis (e.g., Arenas et al., 2020; Ezell et al., 2022; Karam & Jamali, 2013). The institutional change lens is a unique and prominent lens as it cuts across several disciplines and acknowledges that the current underlying structures and arrangements often perpetuate unsustainable practices, hindering progress towards a more balanced and harmonious coexistence between people and the planet (Hampel et al., 2017; Kunisch et al., 2023; Scott, 1987). Moreover, this lens recognises that institutional change does not necessarily involve completely discarding established practices but rather introducing modifications or alternatives within the existing institutional framework (Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Seo & Creed, 2002).

However, as the knowledge on institutional change to achieve sustainability continues to gain popularity, scholars are continually using different facets of the institutional change for instance varying levels of analysis and theoretical lenses (i.e institutional work, institutional entrepreneurship, institutional logics etc), across environmental, social, and economic domains of sustainability thereby results in fragmentation within the discourse (Dordi & Palaschuk, 2022; Vinayavekhin et al., 2023). The continued lack of harmonisation and synergy within management field scholarly debate only draws us further away from understanding how institutional change can address sustainability issues (Carton et al., 2023; Dordi & Palaschuk, 2022) Furthermore, extant studies have predominantly explored institutional change from the point of view of the new sustainable institution where the role of the existing institutions in the change process is often overlooked. While these studies offer valuable contributions to the scholarly debate, a more comprehensive understanding requires acknowledging the interconnected dynamics between new and existing institutions in the pursuit of sustainability.

This review seeks to assess the existing scholarly literature on the achieving sustainability from an institutional change lens and provide a holistic, comprehensive understanding of the change process. As such our review is guided by the following fundamental research question: "How do organisations engage in institutional change to achieve sustainability*"*. The study contributes to both the sustainability literature and institutional change literature in several ways. First, the systematic literature review methodology allowed us to transcend across several disciplines (62 journal sources) to extend the understanding of how sustainability is achieved (Böhm et al., 2022; George et al., 2016; Kunisch et al., 2023) by studying a prominent theoretical perspective of institutional change. Specifically, our review presents a holistic overview of the institutional change process without limiting to one sustainability dimension. In doing so, we unpack the process of institutional change by examining the triggers, change agents, change processes and change outcomes. Furthermore, we propose four distinct

institutional change models that highlight the interaction between the existing institutions and sustainable institutions. These models elaborate on diverse change triggers, the role of change agents, and the varied processes and outcomes involved. This provides a nuanced comprehension of how changes unfold within the existing framework.

Review Methodology

The systematic review approach proposed by Tranfield and colleagues in 2003 was utilised to thoroughly analyse the academic literature regarding institutional change in achieving sustainability. This methodological framework allows researchers to sift through a wealth of scholarly works, distilling key findings and insights to provide a comprehensive overview of the field (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

In adherence to Tranfield et al.'s (2003) guidance, this review adopts a structured approach involving five significant phases to attain a thorough synthesis of information[1].

1. *Identification of research* A systematic search was conducted in peer-reviewed journals to identify relevant studies in the scientific literature. The search strategy was guided by two main themes: "Institutional change" and "Sustainability." To ensure comprehensive coverage, a scoping review was initially performed to identify keywords representing these themes. For the theme of institutional change, keywords such as "institutional change," "institutional work," "institutional reform," and "institutional entrepreneurship" were selected. Similarly, for the theme of sustainability, keywords such as "sustainability," "social impact," "environment," "triple bottom line," "social responsibility," "green," "grand challenges," "societal

[1] While we present these steps in a linear fashion for clarity, it's important to note that, in practice, these steps were followed iteratively to ensure a robust and comprehensive analysis.

challenges," and "climate change" were chosen. These keywords were thoroughly searched in the title, abstract, and keywords fields of SCOPUS and EBSCO to assure research dependability and quality. Scopus was chosen because it is the largest peer-reviewed literature database and has widespread access to scientific articles. Sustainability is interdisciplinary; hence publications have to be found across fields. To ensure relevance to the research context, the search was limited to Business and Management articles, including ones from accounting, ethics, marketing, operations, and strategy journals (see Table 1). This review included only English-language studies. EBSCO also dominates business and management scholarly research. Thus, it was chosen to include all relevant management research on institutional change and sustainability in the evaluation. Searching both databases revealed 2062 titles after deleting duplicates.

2. *Selection of studies* We established a set of criteria to guide our screening process for article selection. Our dataset was not limited by study type; therefore, we included both empirical and theoretical studies that met the following criteria: peer-reviewed and published in English until January 2024. Given that the application of institutional change to the context of sustainability represents an evolving and emerging field (Dordi & Palaschuk, 2022), we intentionally refrained from imposing restrictions on the publication year. In addition to these inclusion criteria, we defined relevance criteria (see table 1). The removal of duplicates and application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to abstracts and preliminary full text screening lead to a sample of 109 articles. In addition to the articles identified through the systematic search, a supplementary set of 3 articles was incorporated into the analysis. These additional articles were sourced from the authors' prior reading, cross-referencing of relevant literature, and snowballing

from the articles obtained through the initial database search. As such the sample for full text review was 112 articles.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion (Relevance) criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study Type	Empirical and Theoretical (conceptual studies)	
Publication status and source	Peer-reviewed in Business and Management field.	
Language	English	Any language other than English.
Time Frame	On or before 5th January 2024	
Relevance	• *Direct reference* studies were included if they directly referenced institutional change within the context of sustainability. This means that the studies should explicitly discuss or analyse the relationship, impact, or dynamics of institutional change in the context of sustainability. • *Comprehensive Exploration:* the studies needed to delve into the nuances of how institutional change and sustainability are interrelated, rather than merely mentioning them in passing. • *Substantive Engagement*: the selected studies should engage substantively with both institutional change and sustainability, demonstrating a meaningful connection between these two areas of study.	• *General Mentions*: studies that were excluded under this criterion were those that made only general or shallow references to the terms "sustainability" and "institutional change" or their related synonyms. These studies briefly touched upon these concepts without offering a substantial or meaningful exploration. • *Isolated Examination*: studies were omitted if they focused exclusively on one of these concepts, such as sustainability or institutional change, in isolation. In other words, studies that delved deeply into just one aspect and did not explore the interconnectedness of institutional change and sustainability were excluded.

3. *Quality Assessment* While reviewing the full-text versions of the remaining articles for data extraction, a quality check was also applied to evaluate the scientific rigor of the studies. To appraise the quality of the chosen articles, we adopted and, employed a widely recognised evaluation tool which provided a systematic and objective means to evaluate the robustness and credibility of the included studies. Studies that did not score

between “medium to high” were excluded, as such 108 articles were retained in the final sample as 4 articles did not meet the quality standards.

4. *Data Extraction* The insights from 108 articles were arranged into an Excel spreadsheet. This comprehensive dataset was structured under descriptive, methodological, and thematic categories, ensuring clarity and coherence in the presentation. A detailed understanding of the scholarly landscape was obtained by surveying chosen articles from 2002 to the present. Since 2015, scholarly output has steadily increased, peaking at 21 publications in 2019 (Figure 1). The recent formation of the sustainability and institutional change study topic has contributed to this significant increase in academic contributions. Thus, this field's immaturity explains the lack of publications before 2015. The Journal of Cleaner Production, known for its rigorous peer review and interdisciplinary approach, published 10 of the research. This shows the journal's importance in the field. The Journal of Business Ethics, Accounting, Auditing, and Accountability Journal, and Business Strategy & the Environment have contributed 7, 7, and 5 papers. The remaining contributions were published in 68 journals in business, production and operations management, geography, and environmental management (see table 2). Wide range of publication channels shows multidisciplinary interest in the subject.

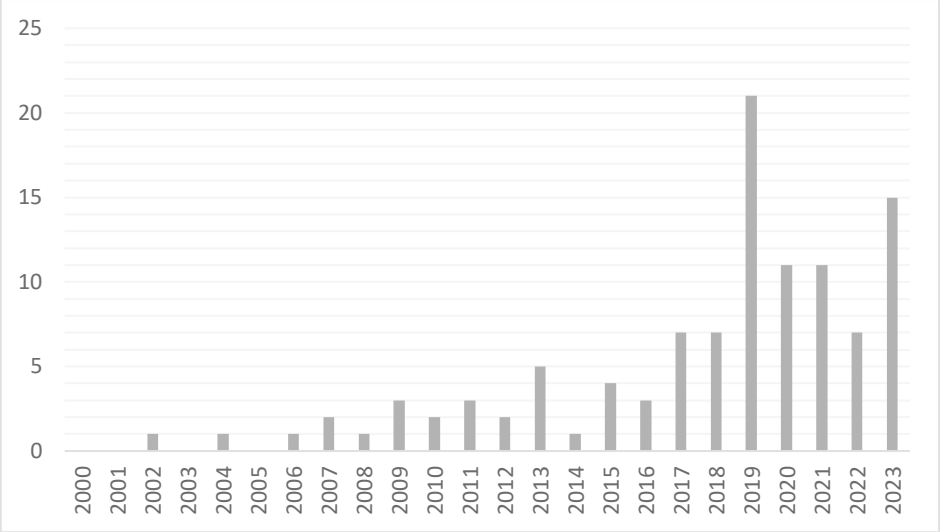


Figure 1: Article distribution by year

5. *Data Synthesis* We used an open coding technique to find the themes and key information from the dataset, as such the themes were later organised into well-defined categories that were used to analyse the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Table 2: Journal Sources

Source Title	Number of Articles
Journal of Cleaner Production	10
Journal of Business Ethics	7
Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal	7
Business Strategy and the Environment	5
Organization Studies	3
Business Ethics Quarterly	3
Journal of Change Management	3
Journal of Business Venturing	2
Journal of Environmental Planning and Management	2
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	2
Strategic Organization	2
Environmental Policy and Governance	2
Journal of Marketing Management	2
European Management Journal	2
Critical Perspectives on Accounting	2
Other Management Journals (n=1)	53
Total	**108**

Thematic Analysis

The literature was systematically reviewed and grouped into 4 main categories, namely the triggers, change agents, institutional work practices and change outcomes (see Figure 2), that served as guiding segments to answer the review question "*How do organisations engage in institutional change to achieve sustainability?".* These categories explain different aspects of the change process, thereby providing a holistic overview of how institutional change to achieve sustainability occurs.

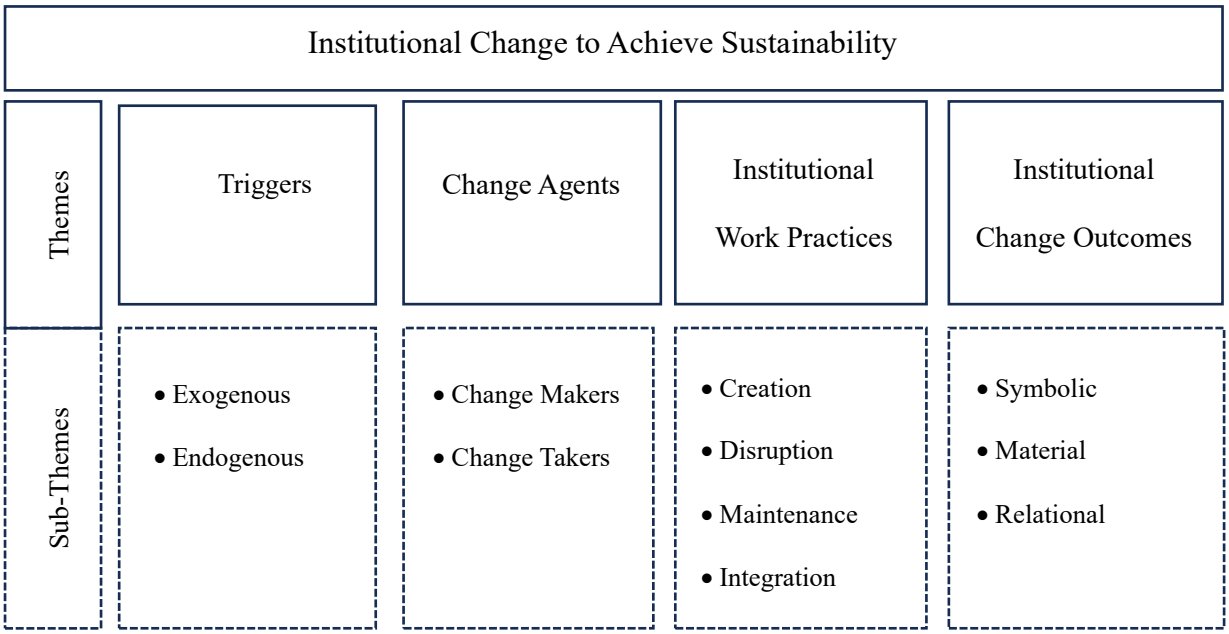


Figure 2: Thematic Analysis Summary

Triggers

Institutional change for sustainability is initiated by triggers that can be more broadly categorised as stemming from exogenous and endogenous sources (Ben-Amar et al., 2023; Bengtsson, 2008; Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Hiss, 2009; Jastram et al., 2022; Salignac et al., 2018; Scott, 1987).

Exogenous sources relate to the external pressures (often macro level) that exert influence to alter the existing institutional system to incorporate sustainability (Arenas et al., 2020; Brodnik

& Brown, 2018; Jones et al., 2019; Purtik & Arenas, 2019). One set of triggers include the introduction of new (or changes in) regulations such as mandating specific sustainability standards, reporting requirements, or environmental targets (Bengtsson, 2008; Bui & Fowler, 2019; Contrafatto et al., 2019; Foxon, 2013; Gruezmacher & Van Assche, 2015; Lashitew, 2021; Shen & Jiang, 2021; Van Alstine, 2009).

Another set of triggers includes crisis events such as environmental disasters which have been shown to influence corporate responses and strategies (Child et al., 2007; Hoffman & Devereaux Jennings, 2011; Van Alstine, 2009). Additionally, innovations in areas like renewable energy, waste management, or supply chain practices play a significant role in shaping corporate sustainability efforts (Benn & Baker, 2009; Brodnik & Brown, 2018; Haftor & Climent, 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Purtik & Arenas, 2019; Venugopal & Viswanathan, 2019). Furthermore, other studies indicate that market dynamics, influenced by changing consumer preferences and a growing demand for sustainable products or services also serve as triggers of change (Westman et al., 2023; Yngfalk, 2019). These external sources challenge the existing institutions thereby invoking conflict in institutional logics prevailing in the field and creating a sense of urgency to re-evaluate the existing institutions (Arjaliès, 2010; Contrafatto et al., 2019; Hota et al., 2023; Waples & Botsford Morgan, 2023).

The literature further indicates that institutional change can be initiated by endogenous sources, motivating actors to engage in actions that promotes the creation and institutionalisation of sustainable practices (Gluch & Månsson, 2021; González-González et al., 2015; Salignac et al., 2018). The emergence of these changes can be attributed to the self-motivates (internally driven) initiatives that are launched by individuals or organisations in pursuit of change (Salignac et al., 2018). This phenomenon is rooted in the concept of agency as examined in institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship literature (Arenas et al., 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2022; Broccardo et al., 2019; Gibassier, 2017; Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2013;

Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). For instance, some studies show that actor's personal values and beliefs may act as sources of institutional change (Bozkurt et al., 2022; Ezell et al., 2022; Tarquinio & Xhindole, 2022).

Change Agents

When institutional change is triggered, there are actors who act or react in response to these triggers by initiating a process of change. These actors play an active role in driving change in their surroundings, societies, organisations or even within themselves (Abdelnour et al., 2017; Battilana et al., 2009; Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). The literature describes these actors as change agents. Our review identified two new categories of change agents, which are change makers and change takers, enabling us to investigate the dynamics of their roles more thoroughly.

Change makers and change takers play distinctive roles in driving institutional change towards sustainability. Change makers are individuals or groups who come forward to instigate and lead transformative initiatives. In institutional theory literature, these actors have been classified as institutional entrepreneurs, as they carry a level of heroic act in pursuing institutional change (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). They possess visionary leadership, innovative thinking, and a deep commitment to making a positive impact (Bozkurt et al., 2022). They challenge the status quo, identify opportunities, and mobilise resources to bring about sustainable change (Arenas et al., 2020; Argyrou et al., 2023; Pacheco et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2015). On the other hand, change takers are those who passively adapt to changes initiated by change makers or external factors (Silvola & Vinnari, 2021). While change takers may lack the motivation or agency to initiate change themselves, they are willing to participate in and support change processes led by others (Jastram et al., 2022; Sotarauta et al., 2021).

The literature taking a change maker perspective primarily focus on the efforts that the actor makes to drive the change, such as the defining the rules, seising new opportunities, and balancing conflict or challenges amidst the pursuits (Arora et al., 2023; Ezell et al., 2022; Ren & Jackson, 2020). Change makers often embody a proactive approach in challenging the traditional non-sustainable practices (Thakhathi et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2015). They encounter numerous challenges such as normative, regulative, and cognitive conflicts which prompt them to reshape their personal values, practices and engagement towards more sustainable practices (Ezell et al., 2022). Change makers exhibit an entrepreneurial mindset, embracing risks, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Argyrou et al., 2023; Gasbarro et al., 2018).

Change takers, however, tend to adopt a more cautious mindset, valuing stability, and predictability. They prefer to observe and evaluate changes before committing to them and rely on established processes and structures (Jastram et al., 2022). While less influential in driving change, change takers are essential for implementing and scaling up transformative initiatives (Child et al., 2007). Their involvement ensures the sustainability of change efforts led by change makers and can facilitate smoother transitions (Jones et al., 2019).

Our review shows that both change makers and change takers have a role to play in driving change towards sustainability. Particularly, it is important to recognise both change makers and change takers as influential (whether through active purposeful action or passive action) in shaping sustainability practices and norms thereby contributing to institutional change (Hoffman, 2002; Pacheco et al., 2010). For instance, an organisation may have a lead change maker (institutional entrepreneur or sustainable entrepreneur) who leads and sets the pace for institutional change within the organisation; however, this change is made possible through the supportive and collective efforts from non-heroic actors such as management and team members in other organisational functions such as finance team (Farooq & de Villiers, 2019),

procurement (Troje & Andersson, 2021) or external stakeholders such as suppliers (Acosta et al., 2021), subsidiary organisations (Acquier et al., 2018), customers and competitors (Jones et al., 2019).

How Changes Happen: Institutional Work

Much like previous research on the dynamics of change, our review noted that change agents engage in institutional work practices aimed at the “creation, disruption, maintenance” of institutions (Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2013; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Our analysis uncovered a fourth type of institutional work, which we have termed "integration." This category is particularly evident in the context of sustainability, where numerous institutions must collaborate and work together. This approach moves beyond previous studies that have typically examined institutions in isolation from one another (Hampel et al., 2017; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013). Given the inherently interconnected nature of sustainability, understanding how sustainable institutions interact alongside existing institutions offers a more holistic perspective of on the complex process of institutional change.

Creation Practices

The literature shows that change agents engage in practices that are aimed at creating sustainable institutions. These actors employ a range of strategies and practices to navigate the complexities of instituting change and to create a supportive environment for the emergence of the sustainable institution (Arjaliès, 2010; Child et al., 2007; Gasbarro et al., 2018; Vellesalu et al., 2023).

One key practice employed by change agents is the nurturing of networks and coalitions. By forming connections and relationships with stakeholders, partners, and experts, actors can gain legitimacy and access to valuable resources (Arenas et al., 2020; De Bakker, 2012; Gorissen et

al., 2018). These networks often extend beyond existing individual, organisational or societal boundaries and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise necessary for institution-building (Andersson & Buser, 2022; Child et al., 2007; Foxon, 2013; Westman et al., 2023). Additionally, actors often collaborate with like-minded groups and organisations to amplify their collective influence, pool resources, and advance their shared goals. In the study conducted by Alexius and Furusten (2020), a captivating example emerges of a change agent skilfully leveraging personal connections to advance his agenda advancing environmental awareness within science fields. The change agent adeptly utilises their network to gather feedback on their ideas, fostering a culture of collaboration and refinement. Moreover, they strategically expand into new domains aligned with colleagues, effectively broadening their influence, and sparking interdisciplinary cooperation.

In addition to building relationships, advocacy and lobbying practices are crucial tools employed by these change agents engaged in creation work (Brodnik & Brown, 2018; Gibassier, 2017; Gond et al., 2018). By actively participating in policy discussions and engaging with decision-makers, change agents can influence the development of regulations, laws, and policies that are conducive to the establishment of the new institution. This strategic engagement helps shape the broader institutional context in which the new institution will operate (Hiss, 2009; Pacheco et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2019; Preuss et al., 2022). Furthermore, engaging potential beneficiaries, affected communities, industry experts, and other stakeholders helps actors gather insights, feedback, and support thereby enhancing the effectiveness of lobbying and advocacy efforts (Arenas et al., 2020; Hota et al., 2023; Salignac et al., 2018; Tschumi & Mayer, 2023). Public awareness campaigns and media outreach efforts further enhance visibility and generate interest in the new institution's mission and goals (Kaplan, 2023; Karam & Jamali, 2013).

To validate the feasibility and effectiveness of the new institution's proposed activities, actors often initiate pilot projects or prototypes. These experimental initiatives serve as tangible demonstrations, providing evidence of the institution's potential impact and enabling refinement of its design (Alexius & Furusten, 2020; Arenas et al., 2020; Brodnik & Brown, 2018).

Disruption Practices

Our review identified actions aimed at disrupting and deinstitutionalising the existing institutions that pose a barrier to achieve sustainability (Hermelingmeier et al., 2023; Karam & Jamali, 2013). The review shows that change agents may deliberately adopt a "radical transparency" approach, exposing existing inefficiencies, inequalities, and shortcomings within existing institutions (Bozkurt et al., 2022; Child et al., 2007; Joo et al., 2023). By shedding light on systemic issues, these change agents compel other actors to confront uncomfortable truths and seek alternatives, fostering a climate of urgency and receptiveness to change. For instance, Karam and Jamali (2013) studied how change agents were able to disrupt existing institutions that does not factor in gender equality in the Middle East by demonstrating the costs that their society incurs if they continue to leave women out of employment. Such practices were seen as a means of reducing the legitimacy of these institutions, ultimately leading to their rejection and paving the way for more inclusive and equitable systems.

Our analysis also reveals that change agents frequently employ practices deliberately aimed at challenging and deviating from the established norms and conventions within the institution. Instead of adhering to the conventional ways of operating, these actors purposefully choose to deviate from the status quo and employ innovative and unconventional approaches to further the cause of establishing a sustainable institution (Arenas et al., 2020; Ezell et al., 2022; Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). For example, in their study, Ezell and colleagues (2022) demonstrated how individuals living in small houses challenged punitive housing codes put in

place by the government. They achieved this by voluntarily giving up access to amenities and relocating from desirable areas. By breaking away from the usual patterns of behaviour and challenging established routines, these actors introduce a sense of novelty and unpredictability into the institutional context. These actions often serve as catalysts for re-evaluation and reflection among other actors in the existing institution, as they are prompted to question the relevance and effectiveness of their existing practices in the face of these disruptions.

Maintenance Practices

Our review has unveiled that change agents adopt specific practices to ensure the enduring viability of the newly established sustainable institutions (Argyrou et al., 2023; Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Farooq & de Villiers, 2020; Jones et al., 2019). These practices are aimed at preventing potential deterioration, loss of legitimacy, or the inclusion of elements incongruent with sustainability. The maintenance practices are essentially a set of guiding principles that provide support for the process of institutionalisation, thereby upholding and safeguarding the stability and continuity of the newly created sustainable institutions (Farooq & de Villiers, 2019; Pacheco et al., 2010; Silvola & Vinnari, 2021).

The literature has illustrated that one of the main practices employed to maintain sustainable institutions is the formalisation of rules and procedures (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Gond et al., 2018; Hiss, 2009). By establishing clear and explicit guidelines, this practice contributes to consistency, predictability, and stability within the institutional field (Child et al., 2007; Kaplan, 2023). Various mechanisms, such as codes of conduct, standard operating procedures, and organisational policies are employed to codify the operational framework of the newly created sustainable institution (Argento et al., 2019; Farooq & de Villiers, 2019; Jastram et al., 2022). These mechanisms not only streamline processes but also highlight the commitment to sustainable principles, reinforcing the institution legitimacy (Arjaliès, 2010; Gibassier, 2017; Jastram et al., 2022).

Rituals and ceremonies emerge as another means of sustaining new sustainable institutions. These symbolic acts hold significant power in reinforcing and perpetuating values, traditions, and norms within an institution (Brodnik & Brown, 2018; Gond et al., 2018; Karam & Jamali, 2013).

Integration Practices

Our study refers to integration practices as the actions and strategies that seek to harmonise or reconcile conflicting institutional logics. When different institutional logics coexist, they may create tensions and contradictions that require integration to achieve coherence and effectiveness. Our analysis shows that integration practices aim to find common ground and bridge the gap between divergent logics, allowing institutions to navigate complexity and foster sustainable practices (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Jastram et al., 2022; Yin & Jamali, 2021).

Our review highlights the role of integration practices in bridging established practices with new sustainable practices. One approach is to highlight similarities between the existing methods and the new sustainable ideas (Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). By crafting narratives that underscore these similarities, change agents facilitate an integration by showcasing how the new concepts can complement and enhance the existing practices (Acosta et al., 2021; Acquier et al., 2018). For instance, Arenas and colleagues (2020), in their study of externally oriented institutional work show that sustainable entrepreneurs craft a narrative that presents sustainability as “convenient” and frames sustainable products as “cool” to appeal to commercial trends of their customers.

Another avenue within integration practices involves the gradual infusion of new sustainable elements into the existing framework. Instead of overhauling everything, change agents introduce innovative components that complement the prevailing structure. This approach preserves the strengths of the old while infusing the organisation with a refreshed perspective

(Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Farooq & de Villiers, 2018, 2019; Gond et al., 2018). For instance, Gond and colleagues (2018) showed managers engaged in "strategifying work" which they shifted CSR activities from a periphery activity to a core activity in UK electricity company by integrating new aspects such as performance metrics that connect with existing reporting and auditing systems and infusing existing artefacts to relate to their desired direction of CSR.

Moreover, integration practices encompass the art of tailored adoption. This entails designing new sustainable elements to seamlessly fit within the existing organisational context (Argento et al., 2019; Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Gond et al., 2018). For instance, the study by Farooq and de Villiers (2018) underscores the importance of flexibility in integration practices. They showed how accounting and non-accounting sustainability assurance managers were able to adopt different approaches to sustainability assurance that was tailored to the conditions in which they operate. This flexibility enables a more personalised and nuanced incorporation of sustainable practices, ensuring that they align with the unique characteristics and requirements their context.

Change Outcomes

Central to the process of institutional change is the change occurring within and to the institution itself. Upon delving into the literature, a prevalent trend emerged among scholars as they examined the various forms of changes institutions experience which can be considered as the change outcomes. These changes have been systematically classified into three distinct categories: Symbolic, Material, and Relational changes.

Symbolic Change

As individuals, societies and organisations strive to address pressing environmental and social challenges, the concept of sustainability undergoes a dynamic evolution, acquiring new dimensions and shifting its significance. Symbolic changes refer to this dynamic progression in meaning, identity, and perception (Acosta et al., 2021; Gond et al., 2018; Hampel et al., 2017). For example, organisations may also seek to change their identity and ways in which they associate as well as are associated with the external environment (Acosta et al., 2021; Silvola & Vinnari, 2021; Yin & Jamali, 2021). This can be done by finding new ways of associating traditional practices with sustainability by finding connections with existing corporate history and values (Acquier et al., 2018) or relabelling existing practices (Acosta et al., 2021; Gond et al., 2018; Silvola & Vinnari, 2021). For instance, a family-owned SugarCo in Columbia sought to advance their socially responsible behaviour from mere charity works to explicit corporate social responsibility and had to change their company identity from being considered as a family-owned enterprise to a registered independent food company (Acosta et al., 2021).

Institutional change also influences individual and collective perceptions of sustainability (Arjaliès, 2010; Chakhovich & Virtanen, 2023; Ezell et al., 2022). As sustainability becomes embedded in organisational practices and societal norms, it shapes how individuals perceive and prioritise sustainable behaviours (Bozkurt et al., 2022; Schuessler et al., 2023). People begin to associate sustainability with personal responsibility, ethical choices, and long-term thinking (Ezell et al., 2022). This also leads to the emergence of new narratives and discourses surrounding the concept (Acquier et al., 2018; Brodnik & Brown, 2018; Karam & Jamali, 2013). Narratives shape how sustainability is understood, communicated, and acted upon by individuals and organisations (Gond et al., 2018). Institutional change creates opportunities for

diverse actors to engage in dialogue, challenge existing narratives, and co-create new narratives that reflect evolving societal values and priorities (Arenas et al., 2020). These narratives reshape the meaning of sustainability by incorporating diverse perspectives, cultural contexts, and future-oriented visions of a more sustainable world (Arjaliès, 2010; Brodnik & Brown, 2018; Gasbarro et al., 2018; Gond et al., 2018; Karam & Jamali, 2013).

Material Change

Institutional change towards sustainability brings about substantive and observable changes in processes, practices, and actions. We label this as material change, which is tied to tangible, measurable aspects of change within individuals, organisations, and industry. These changes encompass the adoption of sustainable technologies, modifications to physical spaces, and change in traditional operations (Gond et al., 2018). As individuals and organisations become more aware of sustainability issues and the need for change, they start re-evaluating their behaviours and making conscious choices that align with sustainability principles (Argento et al., 2019; Argyrou et al., 2023; Bozkurt et al., 2022; Ezell et al., 2022).

Organisations may adopt sustainable practices in their operations, such as implementing social procurement policies (Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023; Troje & Andersson, 2021), reducing carbon emissions (Bui & Fowler, 2019; Stål et al., 2014), or promoting gender equality (Karam & Jamali, 2013). They may also prioritise sustainability in their decision-making processes (Gond et al., 2018), considering environmental and social impacts alongside financial considerations (Argento et al., 2019; Farooq & de Villiers, 2019, 2020; Gibassier, 2017). Additionally, industries may adopt sustainability certifications, develop industry-specific sustainability guidelines, or collaborate on sustainability initiatives. This collective change in behaviour creates a ripple effect, influencing individuals, organisations, and stakeholders, and driving the overall sustainability performance of the field. For instance, as more actors adopted

energy and environmental certification in United States the demand for products and services incorporating environmentally beneficial technology increased thereby triggering more actors such as existing companies and entrepreneurs to meet this demand by creating greener products and services (Jones et al., 2019).

Relational Change

Our analysis shows that institutional change towards sustainability can also lead to relational changes which represents a profound transformation in how actors within an institutional field engage and collaboration (Argyrou et al., 2023; Child et al., 2007; Hampel et al., 2017; Yin & Jamali, 2021).

Relationship change outcomes reflect shifts in behaviours relating to interaction with others as they seek to pursue sustainability agendas. For instance, in their study of market changes, Ezell and colleagues (2022) demonstrated that the change may be of a positive nature where individuals seek out like-minded peers and engage in social networks or communities that promote sustainable living. Conversely, it can be a negative perspective where, people might distance themselves from individuals or groups that do not share their sustainability values.

Similarly, within organisations, relationship change involves shifts in how members collaborate, make decisions, and engage with stakeholders. Employees may collectively have to seek support from other members in the organisation to collectively adopt sustainable practices, influencing internal policies and operational procedures (Acquier et al., 2018; Argento et al., 2019; Farooq & de Villiers, 2019). Furthermore, relationship change outcomes encompass shifts in collective behaviours, and interactions across various organisations, government, and other stakeholders (Hota et al., 2023). For instance, this involves the formation of collaborative networks and partnerships that transcend organisational boundaries known as cross-sector collaborations (Arjaliès, 2010; Bengtsson, 2008; Kaplan, 2023). These

networks promote the exchange of best practices, collective learning, and shared resources, leading to a transformation in industry-wide practices (Arjaliès, 2010; Brodnik & Brown, 2018; Hiss, 2009).

Discussion: Institutional Change Models

The literature in this review shows that achieving sustainability is not a linear, uniform journey with a fixed pattern. Our analysis reveals four models of institutional change, shedding light on the diverse structures underlying the process for sustainability. Particularly, considering both existing and new sustainable institutions, our study revealed four distinct approaches of Separating, Hybridising, Incrementing, and Dominating to achieving sustainability.

Separating

In the first model, sustainability institutions operate in co-exist with non-sustainable institutions as two separate institutions. The triggers in this configuration can be related to being predominately endogenous with accounts of institutional change observed from change makers (Bozkurt et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2019; Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). Rather than approaching institutional change through disrupting the old existing institution, change makers aim to engage in creation institutional work practices so that sustainable institution is created as a distinct and separate institution (see figure 3).

The sustainable institution emerges as a response to criticisms within the current existing institutional field; however, it operates alongside the existing institution because it requires the existing institution to become legitimised (Berg & Olsson, 2023; Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). This can be done through the creation of new organisations and practices that promote the sustainable institution (i.e. creation practices). In this model the sustainable institutions are typically introduced as distinct entities rather than entirely replacing existing ones. They are

capable of functioning independently alongside the existing institutions (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020) . For instance, in Jones and colleagues' (2019) work on the industry transition towards environmentally beneficial practices, a new independent organisation was set up to lead the transition. The organisation focused on creating new norms, regulations and practices that promote environmentally friendly practices. Rather than actively engaging in any disruptive institutional work, the new organisation spent the majority of its efforts on creation practises to create new and autonomous environmentally minded institution that could co-exist in the field.

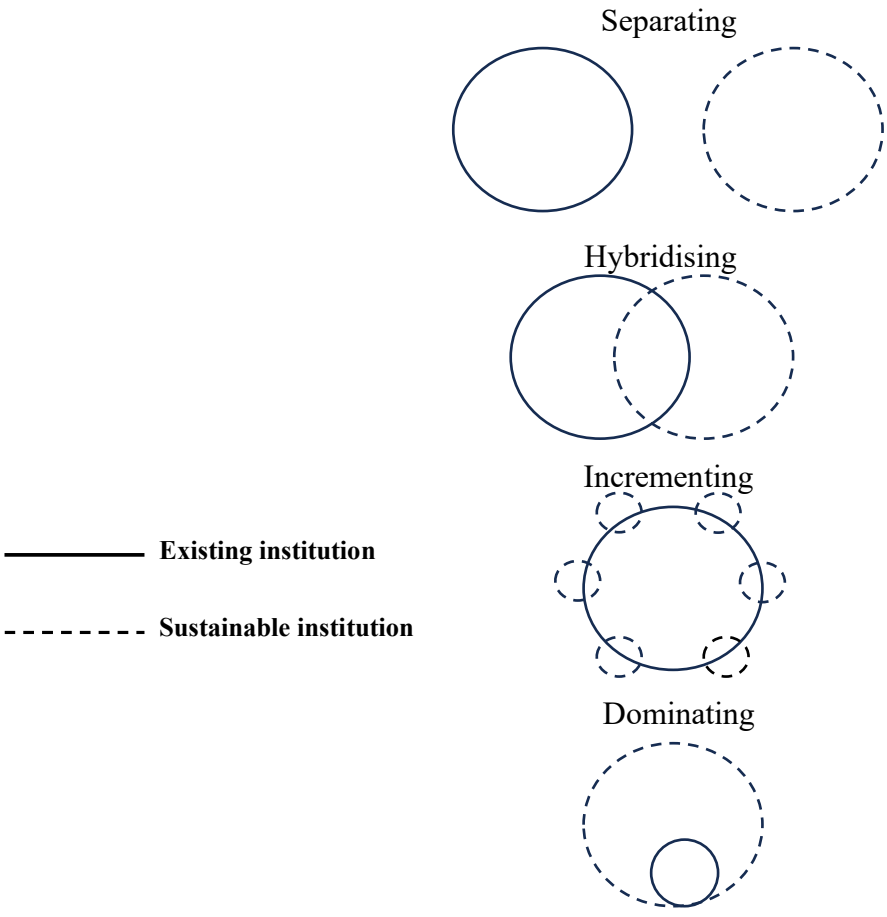


Figure 3: Institutional Change Models

Hybridising

In the hybridising model, the emphasis is on integrating sustainable practices and principles into existing non-sustainable institutions (see figure 3). Rather than creating separate sustainable institutions, the hybridising model seeks to blend elements of sustainability with the established institutional framework as such there is a strong prominence of integration institutional work (Argento et al., 2019; Gond et al., 2018; Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). The hybridising model involves both change makers and change takers who collaborate to bring about changes within the existing system while leveraging its existing strengths. This approach is characterised by the art of negotiation, compromise, and contextual adaptation (Acquier et al., 2018). It requires change makers to navigate within the existing institutional context, finding ways to introduce sustainability without causing disruption. Simultaneously, change takers play a crucial role by facilitating the integration process, ensuring that sustainable practices align with the institution's existing routines and values.

The blending of practices allows for the integration of sustainability into the processes, structures, and norms of the existing institution. In this model, sustainability institutions and non-sustainable institutions are not viewed as separate entities, but rather as interdependent and capable of coalescing. Instead of an all-or-nothing replacement, the focus is on fostering collaboration and synergy between the two types of institutions. For example, Dahlmann & Grosvold (2017) showed how environmental managers were able to integrate environmental logic into organisation operation. The managers introduced environmental management initiatives that fit into the day-to-day activities in order to embed sustainable practices alongside the organisations market logic objectives.

Incrementing

The incrementing model (see figure 3) focuses on making small, gradual adjustments and improvements to existing institutions to embrace sustainability (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017). Rather than disrupting, or replacing the existing institution, the sustainable institutions are added on to the existing and underlying institutional structure (Savina, 2016). It emphasises the notion of evolution over time .

Incrementing institutional change in sustainability involves making incremental modifications to rules, policies, and practices to align them more closely with sustainability goals (Li et al., 2023; Savina, 2016). By making incremental adjustments, the institution can adapt to sustainability over time, minimising resistance and ensuring smoother transitions (Jones et al., 2019) . For instance, Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) noted how environmental managers worked consistently and "under the radar" to embed environmental practices into their organisation. The gradual and persistent approach to incorporating sustainable institutions ensures that the change is not just a momentary shift but an on-going, long term institutional change.

The triggers in this approach tend to be subtle and can be either endogenous or exogenous or a combination of both. An illustrative example can be seen in Bengtsson's work (2008) where Scandinavian socially responsible investment practices originated within religious organisations committed to socially responsible principles. Over time, these principles were gradually embraced by a multitude of actors, leading to their institutionalisation in Scandinavia.

The incremental model typically relies on a significant proportion of change takers who eagerly adopt the sustainable institution they seek to incorporate. While change makers may play a role in initiating the process and setting the initial momentum, it is predominantly the change takers who drive and enact the bulk of the changes (Jones et al., 2019; Pacheco et al., 2010). In Jones and colleagues (2019) study the industry transitioned towards environmentally beneficial practices through the collective action of various actors throughout the institutional change

process. The study shows that the environmental certifications were initiated and initially driven by three independent change makers which are termed as effectual actors, and later the certifications were adopted and legitimised into the industry by commercial actors such as new ventures and incumbents who took the place of change takers.

Dominating

In the dominating model, the sustainable institution seeks to disrupt the existing institutional structure thereby replacing the old institutions with new sustainable institutions (Karam & Jamali, 2013). The aim of this model is to undermine the existing institution by exposing and highlighting its inadequacies towards fulfilling the sustainability agenda (Farooq & de Villiers, 2019; Karam & Jamali, 2013). The approach seeks to disrupt the existing institution and completely erode or dominate it by having the sustainable institution possess a more powerful institution that takes prominence (see figure 3).

In contrast to separating model, the dominating model to institutional change involves change makers actively seeking to replace or overpower the non-sustainable institution within the sustainable institutions. Instead of coexisting separately, change makers engage in practices in which the sustainable institution aims takes dominance and replaces the existing institution. This approach is characterised by a more confrontational and competitive stance towards the old institution (Child et al., 2007; Hota et al., 2023). This may involve advocating for policy changes, mobilising public opinion, or leveraging market forces to shift preferences towards sustainability (Child et al., 2007; Farooq & de Villiers, 2018; Karam & Jamali, 2013; Pacheco et al., 2010)

In the dominating model, both change makers and change takers seek to break down the power and structures of the existing status quo thereby slowly losing its strong grounding(Karam &

Jamali, 2013). Dominance of the institution is often accredited to several legitimacy factors such as normative associations, regulative associations, and mimetic power (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1987). For instance, Jastram et al. (2022) found institutions with higher publicity, comprehensiveness, manageability, flexibility, stakeholder pressure, international reach and existing number of adopters are perceived to possess greater legitimacy thereby more likely to be adopted. This increased legitimacy and power leads to the loss of autonomy and prominence of the weaker institution thereby undermining its norms, rules, and practices. In essence, the weaker institution then gives in and becomes a part of the wider institution (François-Lecompte et al., 2017; Graf & Jacobsen, 2021).

The change in this model can be triggered by both endogenous and exogenous sources, that are characterised by a sense of urgency thereby requiring a confrontational approach to change. For instance, organisations may be faced with new regulations and practices that support the sustainable institution thereby prompting a change from traditional non sustainable practices to comply with the new sustainable practices (Monios & Ng, 2021; Reid & Toffel, 2009; Wijethilake et al., 2017). On the other hand, the dominating model may also be triggered by endogenous sources such as institutional entrepreneurs who perceive the need to create new sustainable institutions (Grimm et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2011). In their study of the role of gender in corporate social responsibility, Karam and Jamali (2013) show the presence of contradictions within and surrounding the gender institution and explain how organisations were prompted by these endogenous conflicts to utilise institutional work to disrupt the gender institution and promote positive change for women.

Future Research Directions

The review reveals under-researched yet promising areas in the sustainability discourse: institutional change models, change agents, and transitioning from retrospective to forward-

thinking research. To begin with our study reveals that institutional change models encompass various facets of change, including triggers, change agents, institutional work practices, and outcomes. In order to enhance our understanding, further empirical investigation is necessary, taking into account variables such as temporal development and contextual factors that impact the processes of change. Our study also reveals that there is little research on the roles that change agents play during the change process, as such research on the different roles and positions change agents play such as change makers and change takes, can help us in further understanding how different actors engage in change (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009). Lastly, we join the calls to move from retrospective accounts to forward-thinking research advocates for qualitative methodologies that capture contemporary challenges, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the unfolding dynamics in change towards sustainability (Spence, 2022).

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