

Nicholas Palaschuk, University of Waterloo

Title: Engaging in a culture of sustainability: Exploring a new role of organizational culture in reducing carbon footprints

Abstract: When considering the scale and rate of change required to meet ambitious climate action targets, individualistic approaches to behavior change remain incapable of fundamentally challenging the status quo and overlook the social context within which energy-use practices are embedded. Recent advances have made it clear that changing individuals' energy-use behaviors within an organizational context is best approached as a collected and shared process. A phenomenon that has arisen in this context is the engagement of building occupants' in creating a culture of sustainability characterized by members holding shared assumptions and beliefs about the importance of integrating economic prosperity, social equity and environmental accountability. While there is an understanding that a culture of sustainability holds potential to elicit more sustainable energy-use behavior in the workplace, the degree to which individual and collective behaviour change occurs is less understood. Through the analysis of time-series data from 250 participants in a zero carbon office building, this study develops a theoretical understanding as to 'whether', 'how', and 'why' engaging building occupants in creating a culture of sustainability within a commercial building context is capable of: 1) reducing individual/collective carbon footprints of energy-use behavior(s) in the workplace; 2) closing the energy performance gap in high performance green buildings and reducing carbon footprint at the building level; 3) facilitating meaningful engagement and lasting change of organizational culture and individual behavior; and 4) stimulating low-carbon lifestyles through positive spillovers across pro-environmental behaviors. The results contribute to continued efforts targeting the widespread normalization of and change towards low-carbon lifestyles. By developing insights into how we can influence shared consumptive behaviors, we can begin to engage in sustainability transitions at a larger scale and induce change that creates fundamental linkages between short-term action and long-term change while realizing the shared responsibility to combat climate change.