

## What is it to be a sustainability professional?

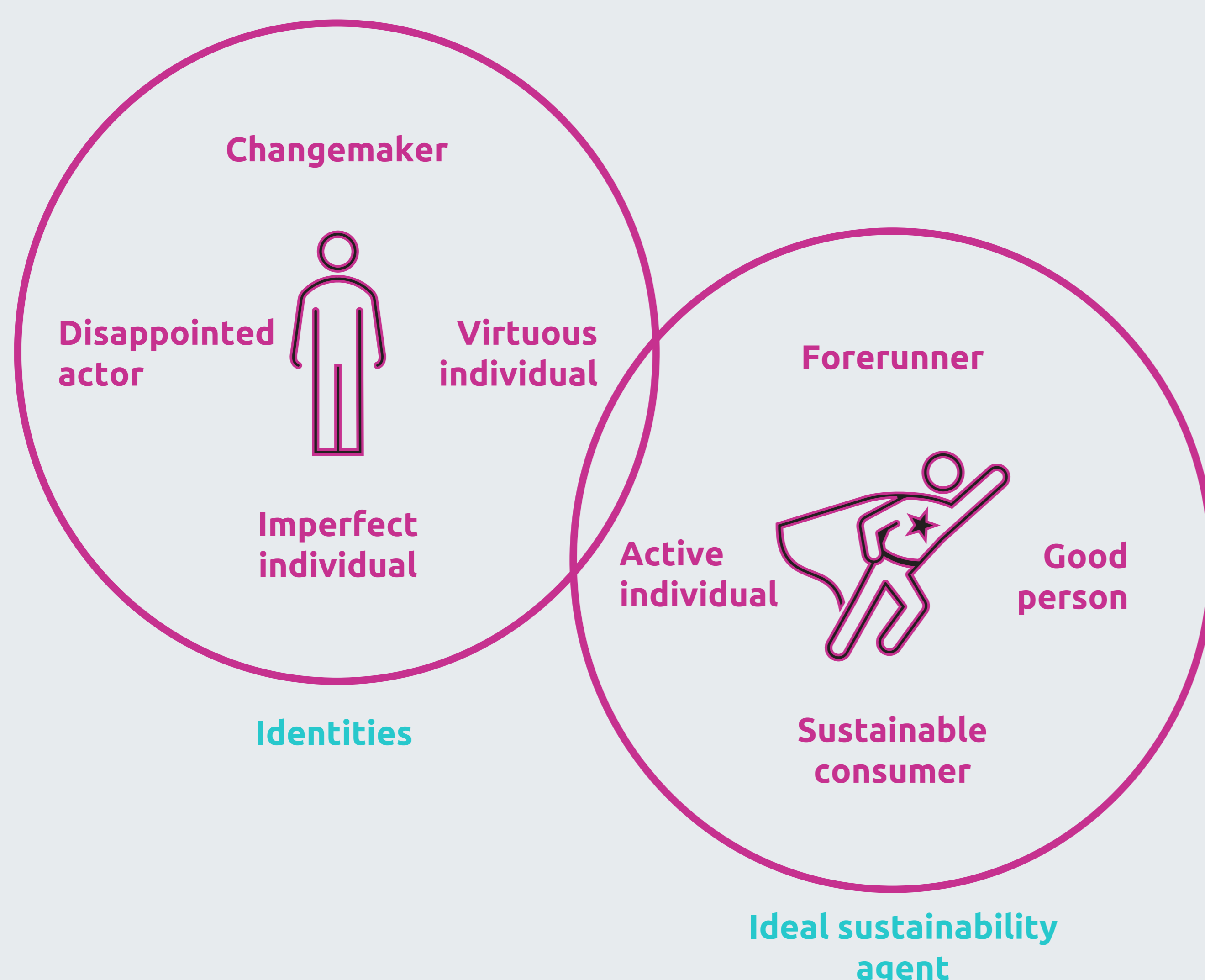
### Conflicting Expectations and Realities: A Discourse Analysis on Sustainability Professionals' Identities

#### Research gap

Studies on circular economy (CE) have highlighted understanding business models, legislation, and technological innovations while what it means to be a human in the center of sustainability-related change has been cast aside.

#### Focus of interest

How sustainability professionals speak of themselves? How they describe their reality?



Findings: Four discursive identities = Four dominant manners of speech

**The changemaker** underlines oneself as a professional driving change, highlights positive emotions and themselves as a forerunner. **The disappointed actor** emphasizes the restrictive aspects of their behavior and disappointment towards policymakers' inaction, slow change, and change resistance. This identity constructs in relation to the ideal of an active actor by describing inability to reach this ideal. **The virtuous individual** gives meaning through their goodness and moral as well as sustainable everyday actions. They build upon themselves as whole and complete by bringing forth consistent values in private and professional life. **The imperfect individual** highlights the contrary to the ideal of a perfect sustainable consumer, i.e. imperfection, incompleteness, and life-long learning.

Sustainability professionals emphasized their sustainability agent role as professionals, citizens and consumers. Inability to always present themselves accordingly to the **ideal sustainability agent** places these individuals in a conflicting position through discursive deadlocks, where they are forced to balance between real-life realities and unreasonable expectations. Results give alarming signs of sustainability professionals fatigue and exhaustion.



Active – Non-active agency

Positive – Negative emotions

Sustainable behaviour – Unsustainable behaviour

Perfection - Incompleteness

### Sustainability agency

**Sustainability agent** = Individual who acts in different roles as a professional, citizen and/or consumer with the aim of advancing a more sustainable future.

**What we know?** Strong, conflicting emotions, tensions and paradoxes are typical

**What don't we know?** Gap in understanding experiences, wellbeing, emotions and psychological processes

### Future focus on wellbeing

- It is crucial to gain more understanding of sustainability agents' wellbeing so they can continue acting as catalysts for change
- Deconstructing idealism towards highlighting incompleteness, lifelong learning and self-compassion

**How can individual agents' change agency be supported without their expense but rather by elevating their wellbeing?**

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