

**Business Frontiers:**

**Social Responsibility, Sustainable Development and Economic Justice**

*By Wayne Visser (ICFAI Books, 2005)*



**~ TABLE OF CONTENTS ~**

***PROLOGUE: Reflecting on Responsibility***

***PERSONAL INTRODUCTION: Feeling the Tension***

***SECTION 1: Business Paradigms***

1. Transforming Business: The Power of Perception
2. Community Business: Embracing True Service
3. Holistic Business: In Search of Synergy
4. Lessons of Nature: Productivity through Interdependence
5. Afrocentric Business: A Southern Perspective

***SECTION 2: Economic Justice***

6. Beyond Growth: Measures of Progress
7. Ethical Investment: Money With Values
8. Community Economics: Local Empowerment
9. Sustainable Economics: Beyond the Predatory Economy
10. Ecological Economics: Grassroots Reform in South Africa

***SECTION 3: Sustainable Development***

11. Sustainability Gaps: Challenges that Remain
12. Beyond Greed: From Accounting to Accountability
13. Sustainable Companies: Shapeshifting Business
14. Greening Business: A Post-Apartheid Scorecard
15. Corporate Sustainability: A Ten Year South African Review

***SECTION 4: Corporate Responsibility***

- 16. Hearts and Minds: The Corporate Battle
- 17. Developing Countries: Exploding the Myths
- 18. Work and Social Responsibility: Quest for Meaning
- 19. CSR in Africa: A Unique Definition?
- 20. Corporate Citizenship: Is South Africa World Class?

***SECTION 5: Future Visions***

- 21. Future Images: Beyond the Information Age
- 22. Corporate Sustainability: Scenarios for the Future
- 23. Corporate Social Responsibility: An Agenda for the Future
- 24. Sustainable Business Futures: Ten Predictions
- 25. Ubuntu Capitalism: A South African Vision

***SECTION 6: Personal Inspiration***

- 26. Human Ecology: A Scottish Odyssey
- 27. Connecting Earth and Sky: Remarkable Stories
- 28. Para-Ecology and Eco-Kinesis: Frontiers of Science?
- 29. Tree of Life: Roots, Shoots and Fruits
- 30. Quest for Gold: A Parable

***EPILOGUE: The Poetry of Business***

## **SECTION 1: Business Paradigms**

This section is about challenging the way we think about business. Paradigms – from the Greek word meaning patterns – are worldviews that shape our outlook. They can become so ingrained that they often get mistaken for truth, until someone challenges their underlying assumptions. The chapters in this section the dominant business paradigm in a number of ways.

*Chapter 1 (Transforming Business)* questions three fundamental beliefs about business: that profit is the primary purpose of companies; that competition is the most effective mode of operation; and that management is a rational undertaking.

*Chapter 2 (Community Business)* introduces at a different model of business, in which the needs of the community are placed ahead of the demands of absent shareholders, using the case studies of the Mondragon Cooperative and New Findhorn Directions.

*Chapter 3 (Holistic Business)* shows how Jan Smuts' scientific and philosophical theory of holism – which is the earliest expression of general systems theory – can provide fresh insights into organisations and the individuals who work in them.

*Chapter 4 (Lessons of Nature)* explores the genius inherent in ecosystems and how they provide a model for more sustainable business, using examples of the pioneering light-wave technologies to show the potential for the future.

*Chapter 5 (Afrocentric Business)* describes the emerging nature of African business, which offers vital lessons on how to incorporate humanism into management and leadership, especially through the concept of *ubuntu*, meaning "I am because we are".

## **SECTION 2: Economic Justice**

This section deals with the creation of a just and sustainable economy. It is based on the recognition that many of the current economic incentives systematically encourage social inequities and environmental damage. Unless we challenge and change these fundamental "rules of the game", we are always going to be like Sisyphus, trying to push rocks uphill in our attempt to create socially responsible and sustainable companies.

*Chapter 6 (Beyond Growth)* examines the limitations of the economic indicators of progress we currently use – like Gross Domestic Product - and suggests alternative measures which better capture the true quality of life in our societies.

*Chapter 7 (Ethical Investment)* gives an overview of the growing phenomenon of ethical investment, in which funds are screened using various social, ethical and environmental criteria, to ensure that money is linked with values.

*Chapter 8 (Community Economics)* highlights the local impacts of insensitive macroeconomic policies, and suggests various community-based initiatives which can help to make local communities more economically resilient and self-reliant.

*Chapter 9 (Sustainable Economics)* uses the analogy of a lion to illustrate seven myths that underpin our current predatory economic system, which rewards the strong, punishes the weak and fails to protect the environment on which we depend.

*Chapter 10 (Ecological Economics)* looks at how economics can be used to reduce environmental impacts, using examples of South African grassroots successes in can recycling, job creation through conservation and community-friendly eco-tourism.

### **SECTION 3: Sustainable Development**

This section looks at how companies have responded to the triple bottom line challenge by starting to balance and integrate economic, social and environmental performance. The chapters give numerous examples of corporate sustainability pioneers, but also caution that the scale of unmet human needs and pace of ecological destruction still threaten to tip us over the threshold of endurance.

*Chapter 11 (Sustainability Gaps)* flags five areas of concern, where current corporate sustainability efforts have failed to turn the tide, including: ecological decline, pervasive poverty, poor governance, lack of trust and the search of meaningful work.

*Chapter 12 (Beyond Greed)* begins with the corporate governance challenges facing business and proposes a shift of focus from shareholders to stakeholders and accounting to accountability in order to embrace a more sustainable business model.

*Chapter 13 (Sustainable Companies)* sets out seven practical steps that companies can take down to move down the path to sustainability, including reformation in the areas of vision, values, governance, work, relationships, communication and services.

*Chapter 14 (Greening Business)* reviews the progress towards sustainable development made by South African business five years after the end of apartheid, including responsibility to communities and the pursuit of environmental justice.

*Chapter 15 (Corporate Sustainability)* looks back after ten years of democracy in South Africa at the drivers for change, including legislative reform, globalisation, stakeholder activism and codification, as well as corporate sustainability trends.

#### **SECTION 4: Corporate Responsibility**

This section focuses on the relationship of business with society, dealing with many of social issues which have gained prominence in the past few years. The chapters emphasise the challenges facing companies wishing to operate responsibly in developing countries, build trust with stakeholders and create meaningful work for employees.

*Chapter 16 (Hearts and Minds)* compares the battle by companies to gain the trust of sceptical stakeholders with the political war fought against Iraq by the USA and UK, highlighting the many contradictions and suspicions which make the task so difficult.

*Chapter 17 (Developing Countries)* explodes seven myths about corporate responsibility in developing countries, covering issues such as economic growth, multinational corporations, the role of small business and benchmarking best practice.

*Chapter 18 (Work and Social Responsibility)* looks at the role of corporate responsibility in adding meaning to the life and work of employees, based on the psychological need to make a difference in the world and a contribution to society.

*Chapter 19 (CSR in Africa)* uses Carroll's CSR Pyramid to explore how corporate social responsibility priorities are somewhat unique in an African context, with economic and philanthropic issues outweighing ethical and legal aspects.

*Chapter 20 (Corporate Citizenship)* considers whether South Africa is world class in corporate citizenship by analysing the performance of business against ten key messages that were identified in a global CEO survey on corporate citizenship.

## **SECTION 5: Future Visions**

This section pulls together various perspectives on the future, covering the themes of post-industrial society, sustainable business, corporate social responsibility and reforming capitalism. The chapters include the premise that we have the power to shape the future, and that creating visions of what is possible is the first step to realising a better society.

*Chapter 21 (Future Images)* suggests that we need to go beyond the Information Age and look for new and more inspiring metaphors for a post-industrial society, such as a Solar Age modelled on the genius of nature or an Age of Human Potential.

*Chapter 22 (Corporate Sustainability)* explores possible futures for sustainable business by examining rules of the game, key uncertainties, and options, leading to two contrasting scenarios: Oases in the Desert and Plains of the Serengeti.

*Chapter 23 (Corporate Social Responsibility)* cautions that the current CSR agenda may lure us into a false sense of security resulting in a Crash and Burn scenario, and proposes four tracks that would lead to a more positive Rise and Shine scenario.

*Chapter 24 (Sustainable Business Futures)* makes ten predictions about how social, ethical and environmental trends will shape business in the coming years, ranging from issues of accounting and technology, to changes in products and services.

*Chapter 25 (Ubuntu Capitalism)* sets out seven areas in which South African business is shaping the future of corporate sustainability and social responsibility, from legal reform and corporate governance to best practices and reforming capitalism.

## **SECTION 6:**

### **Personal Inspiration**

This section includes chapters that give some insight into the inspirational experiences, ideas and people which are a source of energy and meaning in my engagement with social responsibility, sustainable development and economic justice. The writing is deliberately creative in order to appeal to the imagination and passion that are necessary to operate at the leading edge of the frontiers of business.

*Chapter 26 (Human Ecology)* relates some of my experiences at the Centre for Human Ecology in Edinburgh, reflecting on what I learned through exposure to eco-villages and sustainable communities, ecological economics and Celtic spirituality.

*Chapter 27 (Connecting Earth and Sky)* draws inspiration from the African creation story and the lives of several remarkable people: astronaut Edgar Mitchell, biologist James Lovelock, psychologist Viktor Frankl and inventor George Washington Carver.

*Chapter 28 (Para-ecology and Ecokinesis)* explores a discipline that has scarcely been born, but promises new knowledge that could, in time, completely revolutionise everything we have come to know and accept about both psychology and ecology.

*Chapter 29 (Tree of Life)* reflects creatively on nature as a source of inspiration and the tree as a potent symbol full of meaning, including the metaphorical and religious significance of such concepts as the seed, roots, leaves, branches, flowers and fruit.

*Chapter 30 (Quest for Gold)* is a parable, written as a poem, which describes the rags to riches tale of a mighty tycoon, who is forced to re-evaluate his life and the way he does business when he has a strange dream in which he meets the ancient alchemists.