



ON STAKEHOLDERS

By Wayne Visser

Business is the living manifestation of a complex web of relationships.

Just as the body depends on the coordinated functioning of all its parts, so companies rely on the constructive interaction of multiple stakeholders for their continued existence and success.

The dreaming logic of the head must listen to the yearning intuitions of the heart;
The craving appetite of the stomach must heed the cleansing capacity of the liver;
The eager strides of the feet must match the energising breath of the lungs.

Companies that pander exclusively to the demands of insatiable shareholders risk acquiring a compulsive eating disorder, while those that neglect returns to capital providers may soon be staring anorexia in the face;

Managers that place their own comforts and rewards ahead of the welfare of their workers are selfish cancer cells that threaten to destroy the entire body, while employees that make blind demands without regard for the health of the company may unwittingly be spreading a debilitating virus.

And businesses that pollute the environment or fail to look after the community are poisoning the body and eroding its immune system, while civic and green organisations that attack rather than engage constructively must face the full force of the body's self defence mechanisms.

The needs of the private sector are many and varied, like the diverse requirements of the body, for water, food, rest and stimulation.

An enterprise without a market of willing customers is a baby still-born;
A business without a stable government of democracy is a tantrum child;
A company without reliable suppliers is a fickle teenager;
A commercial venture without a record of good media relations is a staid adult;
And an organisation without an incubator of creative innovators is a dying elder.

A healthy body maintains a state of dynamic equilibrium, yet there is no single measure to diagnose this ideal balance:
Temperature, pulse and blood pressure, all combine to paint a picture of health or illness.

Likewise, the vitality and sustainability of a business cannot be determined by the satisfaction of one stakeholder group only, or even all stakeholders at one point in time.
The stakeholder-sensitive company invests in multiple instruments and tracks diverse measures for continuous bio-monitoring and bio-feedback that signals the state of health of the corporate body.

In reality, a body does not consist of separate parts at all, but functions as an integrated whole.

Machines can be dismantled, but if a body is dissected, it means it is dead.





Those businesses are most alive that are inseparable, even indistinguishable, from their stakeholders, for this is the way of the living organisms.



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