

Sustainability matters!

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Working in the 'sustainability' space with medium to large enterprises over the years, I have unfortunately at times been faced with the casual response of: *"this does not affect us, nor do we have any say"*. This '[why should I care](#)' attitude is **precisely** why we find ourselves as a species in this situation of suffering the repercussions of climate change including severe adverse weather conditions, pollution of our waterways and the air we breathe, destruction and permanent loss of natural resources and many social upheavals and injustices. Sustainability affects **everyone**!

That means all living things on this planet, including humans. And 'yes' we do have a say, as it is our past actions of neglect towards the environment that is causing us to approach the point of no return increasingly. Furthermore, many social problems are a result of our carelessness towards others and failure to place well-being first resulting in substantial inequalities among fellow humans. Humans are an **integral** part of nature and must live in solidarity and balance with the natural world. It seems where you are born determines much of your mindset, [education](#), and opportunities. How do individuals and groups such as business, government, and various institutions actively **collaborate** at the meso-level for a sustainable future for all?

The field of sustainability is a complex **trans-disciplinary** area of research - hence I have devoted much of my life to this topic - however, I will introduce some of the basic concepts here. Sustainability, in simple terms, is the ability to *"meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*. More specifically, in my work, I advocate for a healthy and **sustainable society** or **thriveable** future. The distinction is worth noting and explaining, as it invokes the '*precautionary principle*'. Typically, the business '*monetize*' all resources, including natural, social and environmental ones such that they can be accounted for and traded.

However, one lost in the desert with a bag full of money can do little to quench their thirst with it, when all the water sources in this world have dried up, and are unavailable to them. Put simply; one cannot **substitute** one resource for another

(known as weak sustainability). From a healthy sustainability perspective, we need to ensure the **regenerative and restorative** value of all resources to preserve all-natural capital for the long-term thriveability of the planet and its inhabitants. Whereas manufactured capital is reproducible, and its destruction is rarely irreversible; the consumption of natural capital is usually irreversible and given the associated uncertainties (in knowledge, resources etc.), leads us to implement the **precautionary principle** regarding the use of natural capital.

Natural capital and well-being are multi-dimensional and complex in meaning, and thus, granular science-based in-context measurement is necessary. An assessment tool such as **THRIVE SPS** provides the means for enterprises to assess their impact and drive them to **do good to do well**. **Integral solutions** are difficult to construct for these irreducible uncertainties (see **wicked problems**) that characterize complex socio-ecological systems. Developing methods to measure and assess (see **THRIVE SPS**), design and plan (see **backcasting**), implement and evaluate are critical to our success as a society as we move towards a **thriveable** future.

Often business cases are constructed with disregard to the realities of the social and ecological environment. Focus is almost exclusively on benefits such as higher stock value, cost savings, and enhanced competitiveness, image and reputation. Yet, for the long-term survival and indeed **thriveability** of a business, the shift from the internal profit-centred view to the external holistic triple-bottom-line (TBL: economic, social and environmental) outlook is necessary. After all, there is *no sustainable business in an unsustainable world*. The imperative for this **paradigm shift** is to move away from economically oriented worldviews based on the business case for profitability and move towards a worldview that allows for a sustainable future – the business case for **thriveability**.

Given, the **bad state of affairs** we find ourselves in, what is the solution? Historically, our un-sustainability has been accentuated from our ideological push for consumerism – the make, use, dispose of society. The move to the **sharing and circular economy** emulating the ecological cycles of the natural world (biomimicry) promises to address these issues. Taking a **holistic view**, applying **systems thinking** approach together with **backcasting** techniques from **first principles** based on accurate **THRIVE assessments** fosters the required **paradigm shift** with radical **innovation** acting as the catalyst for the design and development of new products, services and **business models** for sustainability.

Thus, '*Why sustainability matters*'? Because failing to address this fatal issue will result in the ***extinction of humankind*** on Earth. **There is no planet B**; we live on a finite Earth. The conserving of critical natural capital is essential from well-being and an inter-generational justice standpoint. Perhaps a workaround in time to come – the optimist will say – is when we have colonized other worlds (a topic for another article). I hope so, regardless, however, before all critical capital stocks are depleted, we owe it to ourselves and future generation to ensure its long term thrivability and well-being.