

Foreword

As challenges such as demographic pressures, ethnic tensions, terrorism, global poverty, pandemics and abrupt climate change force their way into mainstream politics and business, so we see growing interest in innovation, entrepreneurial solutions and, critically, issues such as how to ensure successful solutions replicate and scale. The book—*Sustainable Innovation*—you hold in your hands is part of that shift. Instead of simply focusing on environmental and technological matters, it adopts a wider-angle perspective based on the 3P approach my colleagues and I pioneered over a decade ago, focusing on ‘People,’ ‘Planet’ and ‘Prosperity’.

The subtitle—*The Organisational, Human and Knowledge Dimension*—underscores the authors’ determination to view and evaluate innovation-for-sustainability in terms of the human, social and management challenges and responses. They argue that a just, efficient and sustainable balancing of the 3Ps is best achieved by the development of new knowledge, and by the evolution of better means both of embedding that emerging knowledge in organisations and institutions, and of managing the relevant flows of information, knowledge and (crucially, I believe) wisdom.

The authors stress that claims that a particular product, production process or service are sustainable usually assume—and certainly imply—that an appropriate balance has been achieved between the 3Ps. The problem here, they note, is that calculating the sustainability of such things, let alone of complex systems such as enterprises or economies, can be hugely complex. Instead of ‘sustainability’, they favour the use of terms such as ‘making sustainable’, emphasising that in dynamic operating environments organisational processes are changing constantly, whether or not they are under effective strategic control by management.

Innovation, too, is dynamic by definition. But the argument developed in the following pages is that there must be a constant focus on the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental value creation during the innovation process. Hence the authors’ observation that sustainability is formulated as follows: ‘*a matter, object or construct is sustainable if its internal structure is in a dynamic balance with its social and natural environment*’ (p. 10). At times it’s easier to understand what all this implies when observing the work of a leading social entrepreneur, for example; but if theory—

at its best—is our attempt to capture emerging collective wisdom, then the authors have done us a service.

Sustainable Innovation helped expand my own thinking on the first ‘P’, People. And with the looming 20th anniversary of the 1987 publication of the Brundtland Commission’s report *Our Common Future*, which ushered the notion of sustainable development into the political mainstream, it is increasingly important that we honestly assess our progress to date and that we build our ability to handle the human, social, economic and—crucially—political dimensions of the profound transformation we must now make in the ways in which we manage the resources of our Planet to achieve lasting Prosperity for all.

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