

## STRATEGIC SUSTAINABILITY: A NATURAL ENVIRONMENTAL LENS ON ORGANIZATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

I published a book ([Routledge publishers](#)) that attempts to marry sustainability and organizational theory and practice. This is a book about organizations, and how they can implement environmental sustainability science, theories, and ways of thinking to become more competitive. The information is based on known scientific principles about the natural world *and* organizational principles focusing on the work domain; the intersection of these two realms of research creates a powerful and new approach to comprehensive, seemingly contradictory issues.

The book approaches sustainability in three key ways. First, the text broadly focuses on how we use the planet's resources, incorporates a brief history of human behavior, explores existing unsustainable practices, and develops a vision and means to change these practices. The sustainability field of study is then defined as satisfying current needs without sacrificing future well-being through the balanced pursuit of ecological health, economic welfare, and social welfare. This culminates in a set of likely outcomes, which includes the attainment of a sustainable world with resilient economies, societies and natural environments.

Certain assumptions affect the approach and presentation of this material. For example, I approach this subject matter as if we are in the Anthropocene era (i.e., a world we have indelibly and irreversibly changed with respect to practical timescales). Anthropocene means that we have entered a new geological era with humans influencing environmental outcomes at least as much (if not more) than non-anthropogenic forces. While we can reverse many of these trends, I believe that the current structure of society has some design flaws preventing us from creating a sustainable future (e.g., how we manage waste and fossil fuels). Thus, many challenges we face are *design challenges*; this idea should give us confidence that we can find ways to restructure the way we do things, today, to create a more sustainable world for tomorrow.

Among the major assumptions in this book is that we can redesign society (including organizations) to become more responsive to these needs and challenges. Also, the science we use assumes *politics of the possible*, certain discourses, and a precautionary approach.

The *politics of the possible* advocates balance among environmental, social, and economic outcomes. Sometimes this idea is labeled ecological modernization (i.e., environmental adjustment of economic growth and

industrial development, which is an effective adaptive process). The Green Parties (common in many European countries) promote political solutions to balance other societal interests; this view advocates a healthy management of natural resources over restriction of resources.

Second, I take a reformist, imaginative approach in this book. I assume that the core environmental problems are relatively straightforward; can be identified, discussed and addressed; and that caring for the environment is just as important as caring for economic viability and social justice. Through modern science, we know a great deal about human impacts on our natural environment; I believe that we must quickly redesign myriad systems to meet modern-day environmental challenges. To do so, we can draw from nature, *and* organizations, inventions and innovations. Furthermore, if we can show people the harm to the natural environment in a manner that is powerful and personal, they will require action.

Finally, most of the material in this text invokes the [precautionary principle](#) (i.e., we act even in the face of scientific uncertainty). I accept sustainability science, which considers forecasts as sufficient grounds for action to ensure global sustainability. Assume that the science is flawed, and we take actions to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change. We incur unnecessary costs and possibly a global depression from ill-invested money. If the science is flawed and we do not act, then we get to use the money for other purposes. All said, I feel that we must act and not wait since some of the outcomes of where we are headed are not reversible.

This book draws from disparate fields and creates a story about organizations, their future and how we, as humans, are part of the problem - yet more importantly, *part of the solution*. My hope is that you will find ways to act to improve organizations and avoid denigrating our natural environment. As you read this material, and other commentaries on this important topic, be mindful of the deep sense of urgency we all should feel to improve our impact on the natural world. [See the videos related to each chapter](#). If you teach courses in this area there is a teacher's manual and a [companion manual about teaching adult students](#).

**Daniel S. Fogel, PhD, CEO, SP3, [dan@sphthree.com](mailto:dan@sphthree.com), 1-704-604-0085.**