

Chapter 1

Emerging the Evolutionary Corporation in a Sustainable World: Toward a Theory Guided Field of Practice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the emerging direction of business strategy as expressed by the theoretical construct of evolutionary advantage. It begins with a backward look at the major forms of business knowledge as they developed over the last century, turning subsequently to consideration of mainstream frameworks for strategic analysis, and offering, as a compelling alternative, the emerging notions of evolutionary development and its corollary, evolutionary leaning. Through application of the praxis known as Evolutionary Systems Design, it is shown how an organization may cultivate strategies for sustainable success. Such strategies, based on a redefinition of that which constitutes success, foster dynamics of organizational change that reinforce life affirming, future oriented and opportunity increasing patterns of change over positions of power for both internal and external clients. The implication, therefore, is that this theoretical framework forms the emerging basis for sustainable value creation in the context of twenty-first century organizational dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

The tides of change constantly surface new currents in the world of business. The confluence of ecological, economic and energetic crises that have (de)formed contemporary civilization at the beginning

of this century herald the end of the Era of Mindless Waste and the business leadership practices associated with it. Not even the notions of *Sustainability* and *Sustainable Development* are up to the task of providing a coherent roadmap for a globally interconnected and interdependent civilization. In theory, both these concepts are systemic and relational, but in contemporary mainstream business practice

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they tend to be employed in ways that are neither *systemic* nor *relational*. Our hypothesis for why this is the case is that they are still built on the worldviews and dominant paradigms of the past century — seeking to ‘fix’ situations and ‘solve’ problems — and therefore are already hopelessly out of date. At best, such notions serve management theory as guideposts for the prevention of business induced global civilizational collapse of the sort described by Jared Diamond in his 2005 book on *Collapse* (see also Tainter, 1990). However, it is precisely a failure to contemplate the systemic and relational aspects of business that most impact (and stand to be impacted by) the interdependency of the grids that hold our world together: from our energy grid to our financial grid to our communication grid. It is the interlocked nature of these grids that creates the confluence of crises and the implication of collapse.

Contemporary business theory often tends to foment Sustainability As Usual (SAU) by providing action frameworks that do little beyond bolstering these grids given the unconditional dependence of our societies upon them. Such orientations do nothing to create new dynamics in business and business leadership; new ways of fostering the legacy by which we will be remembered, of stewarding the abundance of our living environment, of relating considerately to each other, and of creating new habits of mind and heart. Beyond sustainability lies the domain of life affirming, future creating, opportunity increasing leadership; of learning to embody new ways of thinking, doing, making and being that we incorporate in our essence so as to enact a new narrative of life. For example, The Natural Step framework developed by Karl-Henrik Robèrt (Robèrt, 1997) alludes to “the other side” of sustainability through the construct of the ‘Resource Funnel’ with increasing constraints heading into sustainability and increasing opportunity for thriving and abundance in an emergent phase beyond (van Gelder, 1998).

No longer is it sufficient to seek the static positional advantage offered by classical Porterian analysis in order for a corporation to develop with dignity. In fact, it is not enough even to learn to read the patterns of change that shape the organization in it’s environment (and which in return are shaped by it). Without a doubt, such business acumen is essential to contemporary change management leadership in the business world, but unless an organization is dedicated to evolutionary value creation, it’s ability to navigate the currents of change in life-affirming directions will be compromised. This chapter explores the conceptual bases evolutionary value creation and the principles and perspectives required to bring it into management practice.

BACKGROUND

This book is testament to the complexity of business challenges in the 21st century. Societies all around the world are currently experiencing a period of rapid and extensive transformation. The signs of change are pervasive, and the rate of change is itself changing and accelerating, speeding contemporary societies toward a critical threshold of stability (*C.f.*, Diamond, 2005) and engulfing the corporation in a confusing blur of strategic choice. Global flows of information, energy, trade, and technology are swept up in massive economic reforms and political reorientations with the result of creating a disorienting and disrupting vortex of political and economic change on both local and global levels.

Humanity is poised to transit to a new kind of society, one that is as different from the society we leave behind as the grasslands were from the caves or the settled villages of antiquity from life in nomadic tribes. However, the countervailing tendencies in this dynamic are strong given the atavistic attraction for those in positions of political and economic power to keep things just as

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