

COVALENCE ANALYST PAPERS

## Sustainable Living

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*"Sustainability is really social responsibility. You can't be socially responsible and unsustainable." —*

Catherine Greener, Rocky Mountain Institute<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Business Makes Dollars & Sense, Scott Fields

## **Sustainable Business**

As the green light finally goes on in the minds of business owner and consumers, sustainable transition from more than just a business buzzword into a business lifestyle, looking to the future and making sure it is good for us all. While the idea of sustainable business is not a new one, the creating and enacting of principles conducive to a sustainable business environment are fairly new.

The 1990s was a time that saw efforts by non-governmental organizations as well as the government and multinational corporations to foster awareness and create legislation for the sustainability of businesses. The *ISO 14000*, created in 1992 as a result of the Rio Summit on the Environment, created environmental management standards to help organizations “minimize how their operations negatively affect the environment (cause adverse changes to air, water, or land), comply with applicable laws, regulations, and other environmentally oriented requirements, and continually improve on the above.”<sup>2</sup>

Sustainable Business encompasses many issues inside its broad and conscientious scope. For human rights, the Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights, a program helping to lead and develop the corporate response to human rights, is a believer in evidence and application along with comparable testing of human rights across a number of business sectors and geographic locations.

Looking at investments, a more socially and environmentally responsible investment called Triple Net has sprung up though there is some discussion about whether or not investments made solely on those principles will produce a sufficient return on investment. Along with human rights and investment, the Environment and its renewable resources along with lobbying are some of the concerns wrapped up in Sustainable Business.

### **The Natural Step Framework**

Developed by Swedish scientist, Karl-Henrik Robèrt, the Natural Step Framework is “methodology for successful organizational planning. It is based on systems thinking, recognizing that what happens in one part of a system affects every other part.”

Their Sustainability Principles are to:

1. Eliminate our contribution to systematic increases in concentrations of substances from the Earth's crust.
2. Eliminate our contribution to systematic increases in concentrations of substances produced by society.

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia.org – Sustainable Business

<sup>3</sup> The Natural Step – [www.naturalstep.ca](http://www.naturalstep.ca)

<sup>4</sup> Eartheasy – [www.eartheasy.com](http://www.eartheasy.com)

<sup>5</sup> Naturally Maintained - [www.naturallymaintained.com](http://www.naturallymaintained.com)

<sup>6</sup> LEED - [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

<sup>7</sup> SustainAbility - [www.sustainability.com](http://www.sustainability.com)

<sup>8</sup> WBCSD - [www.wbcscd.ch](http://www.wbcscd.ch)

3. Eliminate our contribution to systematic physical degradation of nature through over harvesting, introductions and other forms of modification.
4. Contribute as much as we can to the meeting of human needs in our society and worldwide, over and above all the substitution and dematerialization measures taken in meeting the first three objectives.<sup>3</sup>

From an American point of view, most of what has been discussed has been on a theoretical level. The nation is now awakening and seeking to take the knowledge from a something that it keeps hearing to something that it can be actively involved in. While attitudes of 'what's in it for me' still persist, they are slowly being replaced with 'what can I do?' as Robèrt's idea of interconnectedness goes from theoretical bullets point on the drawing board to implementations in the world today.

"The values of a simpler, less-acquisitive lifestyle, with respect for nature, can benefit anyone in any setting - urban, suburban or rural." – Greg Seaman, founder, Eartheasy<sup>4</sup>. Here is an individual who has taken sustainability from conceptual into actual offering information, activities and ideas to help people live more simply, efficiently and with less impact on the environment with suggestion for living including water conservation and recycling as well as vegetarian recipes and suggestions for environmental clothing options including bamboo and hemp.

With the tagline of "Wild by Nature, Civilized by Design" Naturally Maintained<sup>5</sup>, an environmental landscaping company that works with native environmental plant as well as stonework and eco-friendly seed mixtures for lawns creates an environmentally sound alternative to many of the landscaping issue that homeowners seeking an environmentally sustainable yet aesthetically beautiful.

Some of the benefits of sustainable landscape are long-term savings because of minimal maintenance as most of what is being used is already sustainable in its native-ness and no need to pay for pesticides because no bugs will be eating the plants, just living/working in natural harmony. There's also no need for fertilizer, as everything is naturally sustained, or irrigation. There's also reduced pollution, with no pesticides and pesticide/ fertilizer filled water runoff.

Going back to Americas Industrial Age, sustainable business and development were probably not terribly high on the list of priorities as businesses competed to build the next big thing, literally, with little regard for resources being used and what effect their depletion would have for future generations. Now, companies like LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, "promote a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality."<sup>6</sup>

Competition now happens for the right reason as companies work to earn LEED certification

and approval for building design and creation. Competition for sustainable accreditation has crossed from the building realm into the business realm as organizations, consumers and investors alike look for companies whose mission and practices align with the sustainable living and enterprise. For too long many have been talking the talk, making empty promises and vague agreements but few have been willing to walk the walk, creating and instituting real and palpable change.

SustainAbility works with organizations in the quest to partner with one another in fiscally advantageous and socially sustainable cooperation's.

"Established in 1987, SustainAbility advises clients on the risks and opportunities associated with corporate responsibility and sustainable development. Working at the interface between market forces and societal expectations, we seek solutions to social and environmental challenges that deliver long term value. We understand business and what society expects of it."<sup>7</sup>

Another organization championing sustainable living in the business arena is the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, a CEO-led, global association of 200 companies exclusively dealing with business and sustainable development.<sup>8</sup> The Council provides a platform for companies to explore sustainable development, share knowledge, experiences and best practices, and to advocate business positions on these issues in a variety of forums, working with governments, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations.

While the question of sustainable living may not be answered for quite some time, the strides being made by these organizations and individuals give hope for a future that will be able to support us all as we thrive in the joys of our innovations and the great strides of our success.