

## Business The Way Nature Intended by Giles Hutchins

There is an old saying, 'May you live in interesting times'.

When someone said this to you it was viewed as both a blessing and a curse, because to live in interesting times means to face both danger and opportunity, to simultaneously embrace both breakdown and breakthrough, which is exactly what these transformative times demand of us.

The UN Secretary General refers to these times as the Great Transition; Joanna Macy, Thomas Berry, Charles Eisenstein and others have referred to it as the Great Turning, due to a trilemma of social, environmental and economic factors.

My own contribution to this Great Turning is to shed some light on our relationship with Nature, to help illuminate the way we live and work with Nature; Nature - not 'out there' but within and all around us. Because I see this as primary to the challenges we face today.

Whether its climate change, neo-liberal economics, rampant social inequality or rising stress in the workplace, these are symptomatic of a deeper underlying cause - the way we relate with life, and our sense of place and purpose within life. Our relationship with ourselves, each other and the world us, is in desperate need of our dear attention. This way, we move beyond applying the very same logic to our well-intended solutions that created the problems in the first place.

For several years now, my focus has been on attending to the relationship our leaders, managers and business change agents have with Nature by exploring how our organizations can be perceived as vibrant emergent living systems that thrive by tending towards harmony with life (regardless of whether they are for-profit, non-profit or public bodies).

My latest book Future Fit builds on my explorations over the years by synthesizing a new business logic in harmony with the natural rhythms of life. This is a much needed {r}evolution for leadership and organizational development. And it comes at a time when many forward-thinking leaders know in their hearts that a 'new norm' of operating and organizing is now essential. The rapid rise in interest across the globe in ground-breaking approaches such as: Teal, Theory U, B-Corp, Conscious Leadership, etc. exemplify the rumblings of this {r}evolution.

Future Fit is prescient and practical. It describes the future as it can and must be, by drawing on a breadth of insight, concrete examples and range of tools and tips to help

today's pioneers navigate a complex world.

What does the term 'Future Fit' mean?

The scientific definition of a Future Fit organization is one that in no way undermines – and ideally increases – the possibility that humans and other life will flourish on Earth forever.

In practice this means:

The organization is actively working towards going beyond a threshold of performance across a range of social and environmental factors. This is quantifiable through the Future Fit business benchmarking goals (supported by a non-profit open source Foundation).

The organisation's sense of purpose, culture and leadership is aimed at becoming a regenerative life-affirming business. This life-affirming strategic intent drives behavior throughout all operations and stakeholder relations (including society and the environment).

What do we mean by 'regenerative business'?

Regenerative business seeks to create the conditions conducive for life, by operating in ways that contribute, replenish and evolve within the evolution of life: business that is not just copying living systems logic but deeply embodying this logic, by seeking harmony within the rhythms, flows and evolutionary currents of life.

It is a strategic intent to serve life; a heart-felt mind-set that guides our journey.

This mind-set can be characterized as a shift from an overly mechanistic and materialistic perspective of the world rooted in separation, self-maximization, fear and control, towards a realization of the inter-connectedness of life. It is an awakened recognition that our selves and our organizations are living systems immersed within the living systems of society and our more-than-human world.

#### Mechanistic Characteristics

Blame culture

Controlling ethos

Remote management by numbers

Bureaucratic

Short-term maximization for shareholders

Self-preservation/maximization

Exploitation and enslavement

Extractive

Adversarial

#### Future Fit Characteristics

Compassionate culture

Learning ethos

Distributed decision-making

Self-organizing & locally-attuning

Value-creation for all stakeholders

In service of life

Empathy and empowerment

Regenerative

Inspirational

Separation	Participation
Anthropocentric	Interconnected
Fear-based	Love-based

A friend of mine Andy Bradley, of Frameworks4Change, describes this shift from fear to love as, 'a shift from simply providing services to creating connected, inclusive, balanced organizations and communities.' It's time to ask 'why on Earth would we wish to work in an organization that doesn't value the livelihood of ourselves, the next generation and our more-than-human kinship?'

The purpose and soul of our organizational endeavour beyond mere sustainability measuring and monitoring is what is explored here. As it is root causes that need addressing in these metamorphic times as well as downstream effects.

Regenerative life-affirming business is not a utopian dream; it is how life really is. It is our prevalent practices that are a deluding aberration. It's fallacy to think we need to be singularly at odds with life. We are waking up to this reality, and a number of forward-thinking organizations are paving the way. The financial services provider Triodos makes money work for positive social, environmental and cultural change; the chemicals company Pantheon Enterprises applies conscious chemistry for non-toxic chemical products while encouraging its people to become more conscious and empowered so they go home from work wiser for it; the legal services provider IACP's boardroom considers the impact all its decisions have on the next generation, our children; the global network of social-enterprise community centers Impact Hub has check-ins at the beginning and end of every meeting for people to center themselves and share in open-hearted authentic ways; Jamies Farm produces food for the local and global community while transforming the lives of vulnerable children through the combination of 'family, farming and therapy'.

There are lots of useful learnings, techniques and tools, as well as plenty of case studies we can take inspiration from to help us 'home grow' our own unique brew of life-affirming business, as no two organizations are the same. And it's not about 'being holier than thou' but embracing our foibles and failings; learning and sharing as we go; creating safe space for learning to become more human in our more-than-human world, and having fun as we become.

Purposeful work can enliven and enrich us - we all know this in our hearts. This is not rocket science - sure there are some complexities and, for certain, facilitation and coaching help. But essentially, this is about learning to respect our own selves, respect each other, and respect life. This is simply good business sense, as hot-off-the-press research shows that organizations embracing this regenerative logic consistently out-perform their mechanistic counterparts in these volatile times.

We are living through a supreme moment in our human history. It is what the ancient Greeks referred to as Kairos, an indeterminable period of time during which old assumptions fall away and a deeper, more authentic worldview takes shape. Each of us has the humbling responsibility to seize the moment and make a stand for Life, in-so-doing enabling our organizations to become more resilient, purposeful, vibrant future-fit enterprises.