

Communication, Creativity Key in Touting the Logic of Sustainability

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We are in the infancy of a low carbon and sustainable economy.

It is emerging in dynamic cities, competitive companies and vibrant economies all over the world. It is improving quality of life for citizens. It is making our communities more livable. It is creating prosperity and new business opportunities – and hope.

It is the greatest story never told.

While most struggle to understand and address the complexity of the global crisis, a multitude of encouraging examples of sustainable practices have been successfully implemented around us, and a new set of principles developed to help us successfully communicate sustainability. On a daily basis, they demonstrate that economic prosperity, social welfare and environmental responsibility can go hand in hand. That sustainability is about people, society and everyday life.

For us to succeed and achieve our sustainability goals, perhaps it's time to follow their lead – to learn, share, replicate, inspire and be inspired, to work together to discover, discuss and understand the nature of the sustainable economy and how we collectively can unleash its potential for society as a whole.

The potential awaits us

We have seen a large body of evidence that businesses, civic society, cities and countries are making a positive difference and creating real growth.

- Buildings, where we spend 90 per cent of our time, have huge potential for both lowering environmental impact and improving our quality of life. Sustainable buildings with healthy indoor climate, whether retrofitted or new builds, can increase learning ability amongst youngsters by 20 per cent, enhance productivity in our workplaces and improve livability in our homes.
- Green cities are healthier and more livable, efficient and innovative. Green projects in a city like Copenhagen create economic and social benefits in addition to environmental. For instance, bicycling annually saves \$US43 million due to less congestion and fewer accidents. For every kilometer traveled by bike instead of a car the city saves approximately seven cents in US dollar terms.

- Renewable energy creates predictability and economic benefits such as stable prices, secure energy supplies, and significant new spin off businesses. The sun and wind are abundant and therefore providing increasingly competitive energy source that can fuel society's growth.
- Intelligent energy networks benefit society through optimization of energy use and avoided costs of overproduction, and at the same time enable new and additional markets and business models. The average global electricity annual demand is expected to more than double from 1.3 per cent per year in 2015 to 2.8 per cent by 2020. This is expected to drive approximately \$5 trillion in investment in infrastructure from 2015-2030.
- Biotechnology can turn waste and biomass into high value products such as sustainable chemicals, energy and materials that have hitherto been based on oil. In Sardinia, thistles that were once considered a weed and that they tried to kill with toxic chemicals is now grown for its valuable oils. Revenues were a whopping \$600 million from eight different types of oils in its first year. In addition, a rare enzyme that lives on the tips of the flowers is regenerating the goat cheese industry.
- There is an emerging understanding of the positive synergies between solutions within welfare and sustainability. In the healthcare sector, digital solutions can for example improve the treatment and safety for patients and reduce transportation.

It's no wonder Alan AtKisson, a senior advisor and author in the field of sustainability, sustainable development, and transformative change, with nearly 30 years of international experience suggests "Sustainability is the biggest opportunity since the invention of money," yet for the most part we've failed to get engagement and get uptake in society.

So why is selling sustainability so difficult, and what can you do about it?

There are many barriers, from the lack of engagement, lack of business case and budget to conflicting priorities and the complexity of the subject matter. Many people are suffering from climate change fatigue – they are tired of hearing about it and do not find the technologies and/or data interesting enough to hear/read about. There's also growing mistrust and skepticism among consumers and resistance to change.

What is needed is not more communication, but better communication.

I was privileged a few years ago to be part of a global team that co-developed a set of principles for communicating sustainability for Green Growth Leaders, the UNFCCC, OECD, EU Commission and World Economic Forum to address the multitude of barriers. Today, they are moving the debate from theory to action with outstanding success. We must learn to join the logic of sustainability with the magic of creativity and good communication skills to make sustainability happen.

Sustainable products, services and behaviors are the future. They are better for business, consumers and the planet, and increasingly consumers are asking for them.

Ninety-three percent of global consumers want to see more of the brands they use support worthy social and/or environmental issues, and three out of four teenagers say they want to buy more sustainable products.

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