



## **Entrepreneurship and Sustainability**

Creative disruption coupled to transformative change

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[www.sustained.ie](http://www.sustained.ie)



# Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

## Creative disruption coupled to transformative change

Schumpeter's definition of entrepreneurship as 'creative disruption' is highly relevant for the transformative changes that need to occur for our society to become more sustainable. The reach of sustainability into the world of work will be more disruptive than the age of computers and will require creativity and innovation on a radical deep scale. Many of the changes will be to the structure of the world of work and not just our work processes.

### **The cult of the Entrepreneur**

Over the past thirty years or so the focus of attention on the entrepreneur has been ubiquitous. The admiration and indeed adoration is often based on assumptions rather than clear definitions. The un-stated belief within our social narrative is that

the entrepreneur is a sole operator, who swims against the tide and is usually an 'alpha male' go-getter with an inbuilt homing device for profit. The truth is often quite different to this and it is important to acknowledge the many different types of entrepreneurs which exist. The small business owner is not automatically an entrepreneur as often they are in a specific business because that is who they are rather than because it makes money. There is also the social entrepreneur, the community worker, the co-operative members and the collaborator. Many of these are entrepreneurial without being an entrepreneur. It is time to widen our definition and celebrate the diversity within entrepreneurs.

If we are to be more sustainable, we need to recognise our inter-

dependence and the inter-connected nature of our productive and economic environments. To achieve that we need new types of entrepreneurs with different abilities to creatively disrupt the current models of work. Much of what needs to be done to move towards a sustainable future involves collaboration and shared values.

Further writings on training and education for sustainable development can be found on our website [www.sustained.ie](http://www.sustained.ie)

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SustainEd is a collaborative business venture.

## Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

### Sharing Value/Sharing Values

A more sustainable future will require that we devise ways of developing and sharing value. Many of the problems we face are not ones that can be addressed by an individual or organisation on its own. We hear a lot of talk now about stakeholders and how they need to be involved in the decision making process. This is partly linked to the movement towards openness and transparency and also by the access to information and connectivity facilitated by new technologies. Another reason is that many opportunities are of shared value and can't be accessed by one organisation alone.

The moves towards more efficient production and cost reductions over the past several decades have been impressive, however such efficiencies are principally based within individual organisations—measured in organisation's efficiency. In order to tackle many of the problems we face, future efficiency gains will require a **system**

based efficiency and this poses a whole new set of challenges.

We can often see how 'joined up' thinking would work better, how by working together we could all benefit but our measurement and control mechanisms are not designed or structured to facilitate this. There may be problems with insurance, the matter of ownership, the legal constraints etc. We need to be brave, to push the boundaries, to test new ways of doing things and change our behaviours and attitudes or we will forever miss the real opportunities. We also have to focus on building relationships of trust with our partners so that the shared values can be accessed.

A very necessary step is to identify and build relationships with stakeholders who share the same values in order that we can successfully access the shared value!

SustainedED have trained in renowned Berkana Institute and their Art of Hosting Social Technologies for holding meetings in exciting ways that foster innovation in practice. We can support your organisation in coming together to hold deep 'conversations for change' and so realise a more sustainable future. See <http://berkana.org/art-of-hosting/>



#### A Practical Example:

The cost of manufacturing diabetic needles is only a fraction of the cost of the total life costs of the needle from manufacture through to disposal. If the needle costs say 20 cents and the total life costs are €2.50 then it is obvious that there are more savings to be gained post manufacture. However, it can be extremely difficult for any one stakeholder to impact the total system on their own. It must be a collective agreement. If the various stakeholders convene and agree methods of how to pare 50c off the total cost through collective behaviour changes, then the problem is 'who owns the 50c'? Our current social models of individuation means that our measurement and control mechanisms – accounting and law - are focussed solely on the returns to an individual, a department or a single business and not on the collective. This is why we can seem more intelligent individually than we are collectively.

## Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

### Systems Thinking

Setting up a new enterprise is fraught with dangers as the entrepreneur navigates the choppy seas of the market, regulation, media and the unexpected. Systems thinking is an approach to understanding our world which is dynamic, alive and helps to map and therefore, to make better sense of, complexity. The metaphor of the juggler is regularly used to describe both the entrepreneur and the systems thinker. The traditional model of linear thinking to solve complex problems has reached its limits and the challenges of sustainability are better understood using a systems thinking framework.

Using technology we have come to understand complex networks much better than before and systems thinking holds the key to how we might measure and manage such problems with more confidence.

Systems thinking introduces new meanings to terms such as resilience, diversity and self-regulation.

Using systems thinking some new entrepreneurs are approaching work differently to standard methods. Rather than focussing primarily on the market, they ask 'what is mine to do' and answer this from a place of authenticity and honesty. They follow this path with intensity and motivation and allow that light to attract the customers. They quickly ask how do I include others rather than try to go it alone. They seek to include a diverse range of people in projects using supportive facilitation to gather ideas and bring about innovative results. They feel 'inter-connectivity' in their bones and it is fundamental to how they work. They use less command and control management techniques and favour more persuasive and values led approaches.



### The Natural Step (TNS)

is a Swedish framework for working towards sustainability. It takes a science based, systems approach to help organisations strategically move in the right direction. Working from widely agreed Principles, TNS offers organisations a five level strategic framework and a range of approaches to addressing complex problems. It is used in academia, in government and in business across the globe. Dublin City Council uses TNS to inform how it works.

SustainED are fully qualified in The Natural Step and can train and educate your organisation to understand TNS and to incorporate and implement TNS methodologies and approaches.

See <http://www.thenaturalstep.org>



## Entrepreneurship and Sustainability



**“The great challenge of our time is to build and nurture sustainable communities – communities that are designed in such a way that their ways of life, businesses, economies, physical structures, and technologies do not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life. The first step in this endeavour is to understand the principles of organization that ecosystems have developed to sustain the web of life”.**

**Fritjof Capra. *The Hidden Connections***

### Competition

Our current understanding of learning from nature is to misquote Darwin, stating the ‘survival of the fittest’ will allow nature’s competitiveness to select the winners and that this will be ‘efficient’. Darwin clarified his statement as meaning the survival of the ‘most fitting’ which is based on interconnectedness rather than winning. This emphasis leads to a very different meaning and thus a very different engagement process. Our structures, reward systems, measurement tools all focus on how to measure individual competition winners. Competition has its uses but unbridled, it can have negative societal impacts.

Yet competition is a dominant strand in public policy making. “We need to restore competitiveness” is a frequent cry in the business

pages of our newspapers. We have “competition commissions and authorities” but no comparable public bodies to promote cooperation and its attendant meanings and values. Competition is nature’s way we are told however, interconnectedness is a better reflection of how nature operates.

This rephrasing of our social narrative would have major impact on the engagement process we promote and reward. It could lead to an economics which draws careful conclusions with an explicit ethical position, and economists, politicians and decision makers who can use such analyses. We shall not get there in one jump—but we shall not get there at all by using crude economic terms unquestionably, such as competition and efficiency as uncritical descriptors of ‘good policy making.’

The language of change around our business models are usually loaded with criticism and weighed by historical baggage. We need to find ways to engage with new models without threat or accusation and in an atmosphere of shared respect and agreed goals.

Sustained are natural wordsmiths and we can help language change in a manner that embeds change in your organisation, leading to a more positive future. We are conversant with many different models of engagement and we use language to help your organisation to re-imagine what is possible. We have worked with educational programmes such as the University of Washington to introduce new narratives into sustainability programmes. We have international experience of education and training and we are willing to help your programmes, departments and organisation address sustainability issues.

## Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

### Social Entrepreneurs/Team Entrepreneurs

Many of the goals of sustainability can only be accessed by combined effort and commitment attained with multi-stakeholder agreement. Whether that is the conserving of global fish stocks and other environmental resources, organising local community enterprises or developing industry wide supply chain management initiatives. We need new entrepreneurs with different skills sets to those that have sufficed to date.

Many of the current social entrepreneurs are 'showing by doing' what this skill set entails. The focus is more on processes and shared visions than meeting goals that are often handed down from on high and misunderstood. Relational and communication skills are necessary to manage the disparate stakeholders. Released from the single goal of profit making social entrepreneurs are ploughing new ground of defining what business is for and how the world of work is changing. Using minimal resources they often achieve enviable results through the motivation and commitment of co-workers who share their vision. Ethics and values are to the fore-front of decision making and guide the actions of such enterprises.

An example is the work being done by SMILE Resource Exchange in Cork. This is a social enterprise which encourages the exchange of resources between its members in order to save money, reduce waste to landfill and to develop new business opportunities. Their networking events are growing all the time and involve an increasing number of businesses in the exchanges. No one business can achieve these goals on their own and the power of the collective is required. See [www.smileexchange.ie](http://www.smileexchange.ie)

Team Entrepreneurship involves practice of independent businesses supporting each other through deeply engaged processes over time. The traditional model is based on quick returns and obvious causal links which are difficult to achieve in a complex network. A great example of team entrepreneurship training is Team Academy in Finland which has been running degree programmes in Entrepreneurship since 1993. All students learn by doing, setting up small businesses over the course of their three years of study and learning to work together to achieve their individual goals. See <http://www.tiimiakatemia.fi/en/>



SustainED has international educational experience and can help bridge different worlds, linking diverse players and partners thus facilitating the meeting of minds towards common goals.



## Entrepreneurship and Sustainability



### Our Services:

We offer coaching to individuals;  
We design and deliver courses and programmes;  
We write reports, policy documents and evaluations;  
We offer consultancy to help make sense of sustainability;  
We partner with others to develop and manage projects;  
And we try very hard to practice what we preach.

### Collaboration

Collaboration is about exploring the potential of diverse talent connecting in an exercise of generating new models for change. It is about working together around shared visions and in the process becoming smarter, more effective and achieving goals faster through deep value exchange. It is not a new name for networking. It is more a way of working together rather than the focus on 'what we do'.

Conscious collaboration is about being mindfully aware of how we relate with others- exploring the potential of developing the 'we' space and learning to operate from a more connected creative field.

A great example of collaboration in practice is [www.rothar.ie](http://www.rothar.ie)—a business that collects abandoned and lost/stolen bikes from local Councils, Universities etc; liaises with various agencies to identify socially excluded individuals as trainees to restore and maintain bicycles; has a public face through cafés,

workshops, selling bikes and public awareness campaigns.

SustainED is a collaborative enterprise and we can support others through our understanding of collaboration and our willingness to get involved as support to taught programmes and developing short alternative educational conversations for change with both students and faculty.

The behaviours and the practices of Conscious Collaboration:

- Commitment to the greater good and trust is key
- Full attention to the matter on hand
- Personal responsibility for the success of the process.
- Suspension of assumptions
- A culture of deep listening
- A commitment to authenticity
- Open to challenges outside our comfort zone.

### What We Offer

These are some of the ways that sustainability is influencing entrepreneurship and we are confident that through the ingenuity of change makers, amazing things can happen. SustainED's work concentrates on the confluence of enterprise, sustainability and education.

We approach our business in a collaborative manner and think of ourselves as a 'not just for profit' business. We are always seeking like minded others to join with us or allow us to support them in their work. If you feel that what we have to say resonates with your views and needs, then feel free to contact us at [info@sustained.ie](mailto:info@sustained.ie)

***If you want to go fast,  
go it alone;  
if you want to go further,  
go together.***



Enough, for all, always.

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