


Principles of Ecology and Management:

International Challenges for Future Practitioners

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

9

Green Sectors for the Future

Contents

Staples

Agriculture
Water

Living patterns

Green construction
Green transportation

Learning objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Analyse the supply and demand factors influencing the future of agribusiness
- Identify stresses on global water resources
- Recognise the adjustments needed to implement green building principles
- Compare alternative transportation modes

■ Introduction

There are different ways of ascertaining entrepreneurial interest in green business opportunities. One is by monitoring patent registrations (see *Web Resource 9.1*), although questions remain about the comparability of national patent data and, above all, how much time it takes for a patent to become an industrial application. More generally, there are already several benchmark sources of information producing relatively exhaustive annual reports on global trading conditions in different green sectors. These include Pew Charitable Trust or Greenbiz.com in the USA; Carbon Trust in the UK; the United Nations Environmental Programme, etc. One of the clearest signs that a new industry has started to take root is the rigour and standardisation of its coverage in the media or academic circles.

Many commentators today are predicting that resource productivity will within a few short years become the main driver of global economic growth. The sectors concerned include 'the built environment, transport and industry, material productivity including steel, concrete and timber, chemistry, engineering, water efficiency and sustainable agriculture' (von Weizsäcker *et al.* 2009). The United Nations itself predicts that a global explosion in the number of green jobs, reaching as many as 20 million by the year 2030. Readers of this book will have noted that its author shares a similar vision.

At the same time and depending on how green business initiatives are being channelled, different rollout scenarios can be envisaged. A useful way of organising analysis in this regard is around the concept of sectors. These constitute the standard unit of study in most business economics since it is at this level that new technologies and managerial paradigms spawn new production organisations, achieve critical mass and ultimately diffuse. Altogether, these steps characterise the successive phases of a typical industrial revolution – which is how many observers view the present and future of the corporate greening process (Edwards 2005).

It is true that borders between sectors can blur, given that inventions associated with some areas of activity (i.e. lighting) will also have a direct impact on others (i.e. green buildings). In a similar vein, there is always a possibility of sector-based analyses being biased due to the variable speed with which different categories of actors migrate towards the ecological mindset. However, these hurdles are more

than offset by the convenience of a sectoral structure. Moreover, this approach is also a good way of attending to the ecological prospects of what are arguably the most fundamental areas of economic initiative, to wit, the activities that cater directly to basic human needs: staples; and general living patterns. After that, the book's final chapter can focus on another key green sector – clean energy, arguably the main challenge in an ecologically constrained future – and explore the conditions determining entrepreneurial ventures in this field.

■ Staples

However far humankind has advanced over the millennia, a hierarchy of bodily needs must still be satisfied before other considerations can be addressed. This starts with food and drink, two elements without which life is impossible. The decision to use this text to focus on staples such as food and water is justified by the logic – detailed in Chapter 1 – that many business organisations underestimate the physicality of their circumstances, an ecological myopia that has led over the centuries to natural resources being undervalued (thus under-priced) in comparison with manufactured products or services. Thus, as the ecological imperative heightens and people realise the true value of the services rendered by a fully operative ecosphere, natural resources' relative prices can be expected to rise again (see Figure 9.1). This should benefit young managers with the foresight to build careers in basic commodities.

? How certain is it that the relative pricing of staples like food will rise in the coming years?

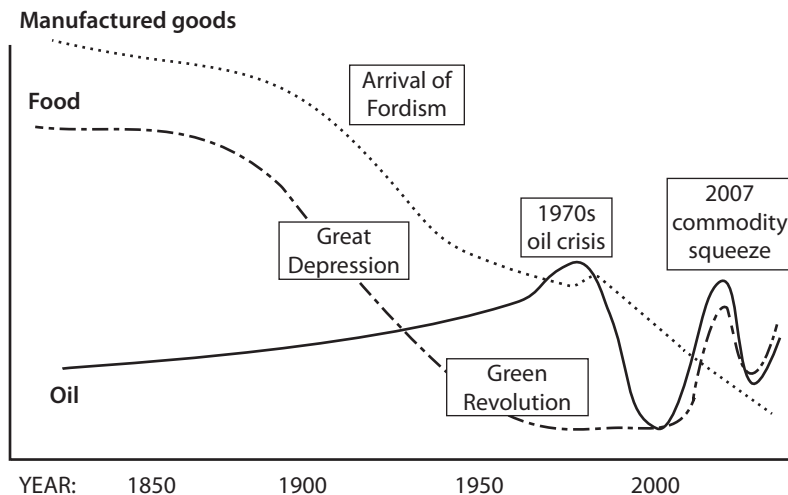


Figure 9.1: Relative pricing over time of different sectors

Chapter extract

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