


Principles of Ecology and Management:

**International Challenges
for Future Practitioners**

Alan Sitkin

(G) Goodfellow Publishers Ltd

 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited,
Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: a catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: on file.

ISBN: 978-1-906884-43-7

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 Design and typesetting by P.K. McBride, www.macbride.org.uk

Printed by Baker & Taylor, www.baker-taylor.com

Cover design by Cylinder, www.cylindermedia.com

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Foreword

In recent years, a number of serious and highly competent authors have written books advising companies on how to engage with the ecological challenges facing the world today. Yet for business students seeking to embark on a corporate career, this corpus has – on the whole – been of limited use. One reason is because the overwhelming majority of green business books on the market today target current managers rather than students. The present text, on the other hand, is expressly designed as an educational tool helping students to incorporate environmental considerations into their business thinking. Secondly and above all, with extremely few exceptions today's green business texts exist to communicate devoted environmentalists' visions of what green companies could look like in the future. The problem is that utopian green visions have existed for many years now without most companies implementing the initiatives needed to reshape their activities along greener lines. The present text, on the other hand, addresses this dilemma by focusing primarily – and uniquely – on the obstacles hampering companies' transition to a greener future. Some consideration will also be given to potential solutions, crystallised, for instance, in the summative 'Obstacles and Pathways' features found at the end of each chapter. However, it is crucial not to repeat the mistake that many worthy green business authors make of confusing hope with reality – an approach that might also (and less generously) be called cheerleading. Ecology and management can only advance as a discipline if sufficient respect is paid to the factors hindering its development.

Of course, green business authors do deserve full praise for their enthusiasm. The present book wholeheartedly shares their view that an ecological imperative does exist, and that it is incumbent upon all business students to take stock of its implications when planning for the future. The environmental crisis is very real and unless it is resolved, nothing else will matter. Yet this dilemma has been widely publicised many years now. The real question is why companies have not responded more strongly to its frightening implications.

Preface

The ambition behind this book is simple – until now, no one has written a university textbook specifically targeting business school students interested in learning how the growing ecological constraint is going to affect the future of the companies for which they plan to work after graduation. Environmental studies have been taught in higher education for decades now, but such programmes tend to be delivered either as standalone (albeit interdisciplinary) topics or else lodged in departments such as geography, politics, economics or biology. Thus, it is from these disciplines' perspectives that existing textbooks apprehend ecology. This is, of course, eminently commendable, but the fact is that business students have been left in the lurch. Indeed, many have felt quite estranged from a discipline that has, up until now, been dominated by the kinds of 'hippies and Green Party activists' that business students often tend to belittle (rightly or wrongly). Given the pressing and potentially catastrophic consequences of not addressing the ecological imperative, however, this kind of false opposition is wrong and needs to be rectified. It helps no one when an existential challenge as crucial as the very future of Planet Earth is being marginalised because the voices debating it most loudly at present cannot or do not speak to the real obstacles facing the corporate sphere that may be our best hope of finding a solution. In essence, it is high time for the mainstream to reclaim something that – unbeknownst to many of main protagonists – has in fact always been a mainstream problem.

This then is the approach taken by the present book, and one that renders it unique in my opinion. There is also the fact that my main area of professional and academic expertise is actually in international business and not environmental studies. I have university degrees in both areas but have spent more of my professional life in business (without ever abandoning my environmentalist outlook). Thus, unlike other green business authors, I am approaching the topic from a business perspective, not a green one. This seems crucial in a business school context where students need a realistic view of the factors (and skills sets) affecting their future career choices. Some of these factors are internal to companies but others are external, explaining why this book is divided, like any good BA/MA level module, between an early macro section detailing the context within which (green) business takes place, and a subsequent micro section focused on corporate functions. The one particularity of this book is the choice

to conclude with three future-oriented chapters but this decision seems justified by the relative novelty of the ecological imperative, and by the fact that business students seeking to understand this new area of study are making plans for careers that will play out over quite a few decades to come. It is to be hoped that this textbook will help them in that endeavour.

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■ Acknowledgements

In line with this book's international theme, the many people who have supported me so handsomely over the years come from all across the world. My deepest thanks to them and apologies to anyone there was no room to mention here or in my first book.

Yannick, Philippe, Rémi et Richard Zizou, *sous les pavés la plage*. Domecqs, Too Many Cooks and Wordsmiths, going down the country. Nick, Matt, Jeff, Barbara and Achilleas, Harry's Army. Not to forget Doug, Chris, Del and everyone else fighting so hard in Enfield. Or the Sweets, Bear and other Gauchos of my youth, doing whatever good they can.

Lastly, a special mention for beloved family members who have shaped my values and vision. Dear Dolans. Rainer (und Rolf), *immer dabei*. Patty and Roger and all ranch Sitkins past and future – *mi pueblo unido*. Helga and Larry, to whom I owe everything. Jim and Sue Sue, who I am so thankful to have by me always. Above all, boo Lea and md Dani, who have made my life so blessed; and Verena, who is the best.

About the author

Alan Sitkin combines his position as Senior Lecturer and Pathway Leader for the MA in International Business at the European Business School London (Regents College) with his other responsibilities as Councillor for London Borough of Enfield, where he serves as Chair of the Environmental Scrutiny Panel. The same duality is also reflected in his educational background, which includes an MBA from HEC France with a degree in Environmental Studies from the University of California Santa Barbara. Similarly, Alan's professional careers include 15 years in international banking plus more than a decade of economic and business translations. This is Alan's second textbook, after *International Business: Challenges and Choices*, published by OUP in 2010.

The book is accompanied by full online support:

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Chapter extract

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