

Business Ethics – Ninth lecture Q & A

Saara:

Do you see any way how Finland's forestry could be ecologically sustainable? There seems to be quite a large consensus that biofuels and substitutes for plastic, for instance, are essential to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. What do you think?

Good question, and right up my alley. After one Academy of Finland and two Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland projects since 2017, I am finally getting a grip of what bioeconomy is and what it could be. I summarize my thoughts in Finnish in this article/presentation in Finnish: <https://journal.fi/tt/article/view/114993/67871>. I am working on an English version of that and hope to get it published in a Very Important Journal. We have also just started our third Ministry project on Ethical Sustainability (a buzz expression I invented) and have 3-5 years to come up with an answer to your question. As long as the Agrarian Party is in government, everything will be done to stop Finland's forestry from being ecologically sustainable. As such. It may yet happen as a side effect, if EU pressure is strong enough. And Finnish forestry is not in the wider scheme of things the problem. The question is, to what degree can it be a solution.

Why? Are you interested? Do you have your MA thesis topic set up? Or would you like to do something along these lines? We have no money at the moment, but we are the unofficial national "fist" (awful term) of "justainability" (a fantastic term because I coined it) in bioeconomy, so we might be able to find something. No promises, but we could try.

Kyoka:

SDGs are originally developed towards developing countries but also used in developed countries such as Europe, United America and Japan even detail has changed according to the occasion. Is it a right way that developed countries use SDGs to talk about situation and initiative in developed countries? And is there any side effect to apply SDGs directly to developed countries?

In the context of developing countries, the good intent is to draw attention to as many economic, social, and environmental problems as possible. Solving any one of them, even partly, is probably a good thing. Applied to developed countries, however, the content changes. Corporations like Duke Energy can use the SDG approach as a sleight of hand, a magic trick to hide their more questionable activities. On the real everyday level they continue polluting and worsening the climate change, but in their CSR report they can pick out the two or three little things that they have done right, thereby presenting a façade of ethically responsible agency.

Kamilla:

What would be the significant role of IT businesses in promoting UN SDGs in the bigger picture?

I don't know. A couple of shots in the dark. To have quick and easy access could lead to wider awareness and better communications. Then again, the vulnerability of worldwide

communications could cause issues. – You have to help me out here. What exactly do you mean by “IT businesses” and how exactly would you see them promoting the UN SDGs? This is a fascinating question, but I just cannot get a handle on it without a little help. – I am, after all, only a simple signals-and-communication officer from the time when dinosaurs roamed (and when IT meant morse-code radio contacts) turned into philosopher (neither of them great assets for Modern Times). ;)

Sabina:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” OCF 1987.

It is easy to identify this rule for limited resources. But what about other resources like fresh air or clean water? When do we know if we consumed enough to much, so that future generations cannot fulfil their needs anymore? Can we even say that in the present or only afterwards when the damage is already done?

I am not sure whether fresh air is globally scarce – it is locally already, of course, and has been since the early days of industrialisation. About clean water, predictions exist. This one says that we have 17 years and 262 days before it runs out:

<https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/planet-earth/freshwater/when-will-the-world-run-out-of-water/story>

Joonas:

In the words of Jean-Claude Juncker: “We all know what to do, but we don’t know how to get re-elected once we have done it.” This seems to apply to climate politics, with politicians making unambitious decisions in fear of angry voters and lobbyists. What is the way out of this dilemma?

That is interesting. I had not seen the quote. Well, at least it means that one tipsy EU official knows what we know. I am more skeptical about his generalization, though. I do not believe that “they all” know. Or confess it to themselves. Which makes them either dim or dishonest. I believe in the former. Accordingly, I try to educate them to see what Jean-Claude apparently already sees. Once we get there, we can negotiate the next step – being re-elected. Maybe. What do I know?

Conrad:

- *Related to the slide’s definition of sustainability - “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” OCF 1987.*
 - *Although this definition is, on the surface, simple to understand, I am wondering how it does or does not adjust for changing quality of life expectations from one generation to the next? With innovations and advancements in everything from medicine to entertainment, we are not living the same life that our grandparents, and even parents, lived. Although I may live the same modest middle-class lifestyle, of my parents, I believe that*

my consumption would be exponentially greater than theirs due to increased affordability of many goods (e.g., TVs have become far cheaper since their invention, inflation-adjusted) and the waste that these goods produce.

- *Therefore, does sustainability aim for static QoL for current and future generations, or is there some consideration given to the expanding needs of future generations? This would be in-line with most parent's ideals that their children should live lives that are, in some sense, better than the parents' lives were.*
- *Relatedly, do sustainability goals account for the increased total demand for resources that stems from a growing world population? This would probably require consideration of the estimate that the world population is expected to plateau and eventually decline, primarily due to declining birth rates in developed countries.*

“Sustainable development” as interpreted in the Brundtland and UN approaches aims at perpetual material growth which makes the ever-increasing quality of life of an ever-expanding human population possible. Technological advances and business innovations will ensure that climate change is halted and reversed. Everyone will be happy and there will be unicorn dust everywhere. – I am just writing about this to a Very Important Journal and hoping to show the Mickey Mouse quality of that kind of “thinking”.

Nils:

Given the definition of sustainability, when is it ok to take the risk of compromising future generations in order to take care of the current? What if while doing so, we discover a way of, e.g., producing energy, which is the most sustainable and what have otherwise never been detected? This also addresses the question I have regarding the European Union Bioeconomy Strategy, which needs solutions, and I wonder if we are capable of thinking of all solutions possible or even more drastic, will technology be even able to save us (pointing to your points about how in the end everything is again related to the economy)?

These are big questions and the answers are ideological. – A technological optimist will argue that humankind has always found solutions to new problems before and will always find them in the future, as well. We can continue on the economy-first road and the answers will emerge as we go. – The technological pessimist will observe that every solution has created new problems, one worse than the other. Yes, we did solve the horse manure conundrum but brought climate change on ourselves and on the planet in the process. We may yet learn to collect carbon monoxide from the atmosphere, but will that lead to some other disaster that we cannot even imagine now? – I myself would tend to lean on precaution and hence the latter view. Risk-takers would then giggle at my fussiness and brush me out of the way. Since the risk-takers seem to be in charge, I do not see much light at the end of the tunnel. But you can take solace in the fact that I have been wrong before and may be wrong now.

lina:

In the very last slides of the lecture, the review perspective from current capitalistic economical order (which benefits only a fraction of the world's population) should move forward. What kind of sacrifices/adjustments this new ecologico-social-equality order would require, in particular?

Consumption levels back about 40-50 years. Every necessity would be available, but luxuries would be rare. And a new smartphone every year or every other year is a luxury. These would be either horrible sacrifices, depriving today's consumers of all that makes life valuable, or just a change in attitudes, "Oh, what do you know, I can quite well live without that." So possibly no sacrifices, only adjustments. Time will tell, I guess.

Sofia:

Do you think that it is really possible to have a sustainable society and stop climate change (or at least delay it)?

No, not really. But let's hope that I'm wrong. I often am.