

Design Thinking for Paradigm Shifts: Moving Closer to Sustainable Business.

ABSTRACT

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Corporate Responsibility Research Conference (CRR) 2013

“CSR – Making the Number of Options Grow!”

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University of Graz (Austria)

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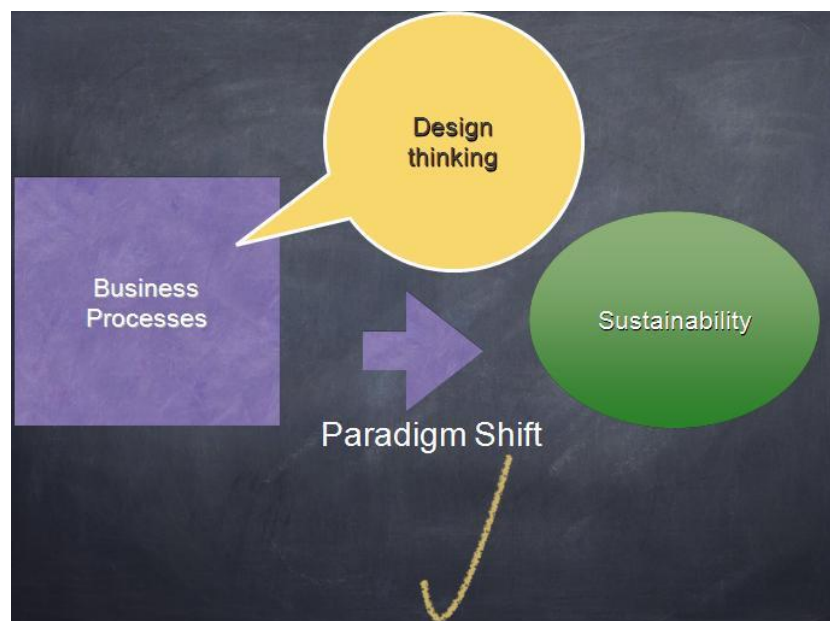
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ABSTRACT:

It is becoming increasingly clear that we need to achieve a fundamental change in our approach to business if we are to achieve the kind of leveraged changes in our processes that will deliver “corporate sustainability.” Much of the literature and common currency of debate is calling for a need to ‘think differently’ and the power of creative thought has long been recognised, “*What we want and how we get to it depends on our mindsets... We can reconfigure our world if we can reconfigure our mindset...1*” (Yunus, M. 2006). But whilst ‘thinking differently’ or ‘outside the box’ has been something of a holy grail in business theory for some time, this paper asserts that pro-actively cultivating an interdisciplinary approach and more specifically drawing on the tools and concepts of *design thinking* in our strategic approaches will draw us closer to achieving the required change in the dominant hegemony that is capitalism as we know it. Thus the primary research question is:²

*– How can we utilise
design thinking in business
to help us achieve the
paradigm shift required to
move closer to sustainable
practice?*



¹ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html

² Please note, design thinking draws strongly on images and so this practice has been incorporated here.

This raises a number of sub-questions also addressed in the paper:

- What is design thinking?
- In what way does it differ from current standards and approaches?
- So how does it help?
- And how do we begin to accept and achieve an inter-disciplinary mindset that can incorporate design thinking into business thinking?

As we explore the concept of design thinking in this paper, John Hockenberry's words seem vitally relevant to Sustainability: *'Design is the emerging ethos formulating and then answering a very new question: what shall we do now, in the face of the chaos we have created?'* (Hockenberry, J. 2012). This paper also draws on other theoretical concepts including the work of Herman Daly and his overriding notion that we must move from "an economics of bigger to an economics of **better**" (Daly, 2007). Parkin's notion of *Positive Deviance*³, which she claims, is "*the only strategy left*" and one which will contribute towards *'a stampede towards a future that puts improving the environment and quality of life as the primary purpose of everything we do'* (Parkin 2010. 2) is also central to this research in beginning to understand the required thought and behaviours of 'better' business practice. Her approach identifies four habits of thought and principles and practices which can be linked to the design thinking approach.

The methodology used in the paper is largely conceptual in drawing together ideas and theories and beginning to apply them in the context of business practice to develop a new construct which both recognises the paradigm shifts we require to move closer to sustainable business practices and discusses how we might adopt these. Business case studies are used to illustrate and elucidate these methods. The paper concludes that design thinking has a role to play in shifting our mindsets towards the different modus operandi that we will need to employ to move closer to 'sustainable business.' In order to achieve Sustainability, we have to do so many things *differently* at *so many levels* that it needs design thinking to be able to handle the *multiple constraints*...under which innovation must (still) occur. The biggest business challenge of the 21st Century is rethinking our entire legacy; the interdisciplinary approach inherent in design thinking may just help us do that.

611 words.

³ Positive deviant - A person who does the right thing for sustainability, despite being surrounded by the wrong institutional structures, the wrong processes and stubbornly uncooperative people (Parkin 2010. 1.)

Key References:

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