

Book Review

Innovation for Sustainability: Business Transformations Towards a Better World.

Edited by Nancy Bocken, Paavo Ritala, Laura Albareda and Robert Verburg. Palgrave Studies in Sustainable Business in Association with Future Earth, Springer Nature: Cham, Switzerland, 2019, ISBN 978-3319973845, hardcover, £92, pp. 488.

Innovation for Sustainability: Business Transformations is part of Springer Nature's Future Earth series, specifically Finance and Economics, which is pitched as aiming to 'help reinvent business and economic models' for sustainability. The book is substantial, an edited collection of 23 chapters, 460 pages, and can be downloaded from the publisher in full or on an individual chapter basis. Editing is from Lund, Lappeenranta and Delft, and lead editor is Prof Nancy Brocken. Below, I'll first give a relatively neutral description of the book, followed by some reflections from my own perspective.

The focus of the book is product and service innovation at the company level, set in the context of societal pressures, corporate responses, tools and analysis from a wide variety of perspectives. The academic content is good to high and the writing is clear, with many chapters likely to be useful for teaching at various levels.

The book is divided into sections grouping chapters that are more or less related, each preceded by short commentaries by practitioners. These section topics are, in summary: context-setting; strategy and leadership; measurement and assessment; and tools. If we look at the index as a guide to the book's contents, index entries with prominent page counts include variants on: business models, circular economy, collaboration, eco-innovation, experimentation, futures, innovation for sustainability, leadership, product innovation, renewable energy, resource efficiency, shared value, supply chains and (the ubiquitous) triple bottom line. Overall, readers interested in company level accounts of innovation will find this book very useful and both the book and its individual chapters are likely to stay relevant for years. The book admirably achieves what it sets out to do.

Reflecting on the book from my own perspective: while I naturally see the value of focusing primarily

on one context at a time – here the firm – if we are to provide accounts of change that do not end at arbitrary boundaries (here, again, the firm), then there is also a need to consider in depth connections not only between contexts per se, but also between the different types of processes operating in those different contexts. The most common means of achieving this is systems analysis and Chapter 2 of the book does head in this direction, referring in some depth to sociotechnical transitions models of change. Even the latter literature, though, is rather short on social theory: theories of institutionalisation have increasingly been drawn upon, but theories of social change much less so and research connecting multiple 'levels' of analysis *in any depth* is almost absent.

This notwithstanding, it is attention to change processes with boundaries that extend through multiple agents that I most miss in the book. This attention is not wholly absent, but it is also not a key concern of the text. This is no surprise: as said, it has not been a concern even in the systems-oriented transitions literature. Nonetheless I see much potential in closely connecting firm-level concepts, analysis - and indeed analysts - with contextual analysis. Quasi-closed boundary analysis may be an academic norm with practical benefits – analytic as well as career-wise – but it limits understanding and representations of relevant change processes. Personally I would like to see more tracing of causal connections through different contexts, connecting individuals, organisations, wider institutionalised rules, to understand specific sociotechnical change.

So, this is not really a book for those who prefer systems-type thinking in the above senses. It is a book for those who want to know more about firm-level product and process innovation. I can certainly recommend the book for this purpose.

PAUL UPHAM

Institute for Environmental and Sustainability
Communication (INFU), Leuphana University
Lüneburg, Germany
Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development,
Utrecht, the Netherlands