

EDITORS' NOTES

In 1972, the Club of Rome, an international association of distinguished business leaders, scholars, and statesmen, published the seminal report, *Limits to Growth*. It was based on work conducted by the Systems Dynamics Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and showed how present and projected patterns of humankind's resource use were unsustainable (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, and Behrens, 1972). Attention to the issues raised by this report came slowly. In 1987, the United Nations' World Commission on Development and the Environment (often called the Brundtland Commission after its chair, the Prime Minister of Norway) published *Our Common Future*, which issued a call to governments, businesses, and parents to "break out of past patterns" and pursue the necessary actions that "must be taken to reduce risks to survival and to put future development on paths that are sustainable" (World Commission on Development and the Environment, 1987). After revisiting their models and data in 2002, the authors of *Limits to Growth* described our global condition as "overshoot" with a consumption of natural resources beyond the level at which they are being renewed and the production of waste beyond the planet's long-term capacity to absorb it—conditions that will lead to a general decline in societal welfare (Meadows, Randers, and Meadows, 2004).

Today many others have joined these early voices in directing our attention to the scope and scale of the problems that we shall create for future generations if we do not alter our policies and practices. The Union of Concerned Scientists has global warming and related issues as a principal focus for action and provides summaries of the relevant science on their Web site. The popular press has taken up the environmental challenge with a vengeance—examples in the past year include *Time* magazine's cover that read "Be Worried—Be Very Worried"; *Vanity Fair* had a "Green Issue" that focused on both the challenges and the people who were leading efforts to address them, and CNN's *We Were Warned* series on energy projections. *An Inconvenient Truth*, which focused on the climate change issue, was shown in theaters across the country during the summer of 2006. As this volume is being written, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has issued an updated, bleak forecast on global warming, the CEOs of ten major corporations issued a challenge to the U.S. government to take action on climate

change (see “CEOs Call,” 2007), and the media are full of reports and discussions of reports on the topic.

What Is Sustainability?

The most widely used definition comes from the United Nations’ Brundtland Commission:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The Dell Corporation defines it as “creating long-term stakeholder value by integrating economic, social, and environmental responsibility into everything we do” (Dell Inc., 2004, p. 9). But our favorite comes from the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy:

In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.

Sustainability can carry an aura of the status quo, and we need more than that. As Michal McPherson, president of the Spencer Foundation, has noted:

It’s not too hard to frame questions about the degree to which universities are acting in ways that may exacerbate concerns about the sustainability of the environmental system either in their area or more broadly . . . but we want improvement in things like graduation rates, equitable pay, student satisfaction. Sustainability seems like sort of a minimal criterion here” [e-mail to Larry Litten, February 2005].

We have adopted a more ambitious frame of reference in this volume: the concept of sustainable progress. Sustainable progress is a net enhancement in the welfare of individuals, institutions, nations, and humankind. The status quo is not good enough; progress will have to be sustainable to be real progress. The critical component in the achievement of sustainability and the realization of sustainable progress will be individual and institutional behavior. It is the latter that is documented and guided by the work of institutional research.

In order to continue to perform our institutional missions for future generations, we shall need to have access to the financial, physical, and human resources we require. Access to required resources in turn requires that the natural systems, the economies, and the societies from which we draw these resources be healthy. Present efficient and effective use of resources is an essential aspect of assuring both the continuation of and improvement in the discharge of our missions. For any progress to be sus-

tained, we need also to avoid increasing risks through our policies and operations. This volume discusses indicators of sustainable progress in the economic, social, and environmental spheres.

Institutional Research and Sustainable Progress

To date, institutional research (IR) has not focused on sustainability or sustainable progress, although on some campuses IR offices have cooperated with sustainability coordinators in the administration of surveys and the production of reports related to these issues. Indeed, except for some offices that participate in campus planning—usually programs or facilities—and some enrollment modeling, IR tends to focus on current and past data, not on the future in which sustainability will be determined. One of the editors and a university sustainability coordinator delivered a paper on sustainability at the 2004 Annual Forum (Litten and Newport, 2004). The paper was paired with a panel that consisted of the other editor of this volume, another former president of the Association for Industrial Research (AIR), and two university sustainability coordinators; approximately a dozen people attended these sessions. The next year, one of the editors delivered a second paper that focused on sustainability measures and reports; the session was attended by twice the number of the previous year's sessions (Litten, 2005).

In 2006, Boston College's offices of Institutional Research and Environmental Health and Safety collaborated with the Campus Consortium on Environmental Excellence in hosting a meeting of institutional researchers and environmental and sustainability personnel to explore their common interests. Both editors Litten and Terkla attended that meeting, which identified pressing and critical areas for collaboration (Campus Consortium for Environmental Excellence, 2006). But that is the history of sustainability in institutional research as we know it.

What Is in This Volume

This volume carries us well beyond the treatment to date of sustainability issues in the IR literature. The volume commences with a chapter by Jim Merkel, former sustainability coordinator at Dartmouth College, that specifies the sustainability challenges that we face as humankind, as institutions, and as individuals, and the particular need for educational institutions to embrace and address these issues; it is coauthored by Larry Litten, who discusses why IR needs to be involved in these efforts. The second chapter presents the perspectives of a corporation executive, Walt Freese of Ben & Jerry's, on the practical benefits of pursuing a sustainability program and the importance of data in doing so; it is an elaboration of his keynote address given at the Second Annual Sustainable Business Symposium sponsored by the Allwin Initiative for Corporate Citizenship at the Tuck School of Business. In Chapter Three, Tufts University's President Lawrence Bacow and Professor William

Moomaw offer their reflections on the business case from a university perspective. The next three chapters, by sustainability professionals, deal in turn with each of the universal components of sustainable progress: Chapter Four, by Gioia Thompson and Sarah Hammond Creighton, on the environmental aspects; Chapter Five, by James Pittman and Kevin Wilhelm, on the economic aspects; and Chapter Six, by Terry Link, on the social aspects. The authors of each chapter identify the particular challenges in each area, specify key indicators and resources for putting institutional data in a broader context, and suggest how IR can contribute to advancing the sustainable progress of institutions and, in turn, nations and humankind. In Chapter Seven, Bert Cohen focuses on an area that is not addressed in the more general literature on sustainability: the educational missions of colleges and universities. This is essentially virgin territory, in which the author outlines measurement challenges that IR will need to help address by describing how he has been developing the mindset necessary for sustainability through undergraduate courses. The final chapter in the volume, by the editors, specifies resources that IR can use in collecting data relevant to sustainable prosperity, gives examples of reports, and discusses issues of collaboration with other offices on campus.

To Whom Is This Volume Directed?

The primary audience for this book is the institutional research profession. We believe that institutional research will play a critical role in achieving sustainable prosperity. This volume provides the rationale and resources for engaging in these efforts. Sustainability directors and coordinators will benefit greatly from working with institutional research, and this volume should help them achieve the greatest benefit from these collaborations. Finally, these chapters should help institutional policy makers and managers see the issues more clearly, especially with respect to the kinds of data and information that will help them make and evaluate policy and engage in management for sustainable prosperity.

We believe that this volume truly represents a new direction for institutional research. It should be a rewarding path, with much fine company along the way.

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Editors

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