

The best enterprises understand the world

Out of Columbia University comes a guidebook to better understand sustainable development and the role played by business

Good culture of enterprise requires a great deal of awareness of the world in which an enterprise operates, and necessarily so given that every enterprise is an entity that constantly communicates with the outside world through the exchange of products, information, tensions and a whole range of other feelings and sensations. Hence the need for business leaders to read a few good books to help them understand all that's going on outside the walls of their companies.

One such book is *The Age of Sustainable Development*, by Jeffrey D. Sachs, which was published earlier this year. Sachs is an economist and, more importantly, the director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University as well as an approachable author even when writing about objectively complex matters, which is why this 540-page tome of his can be read with ease even though it is certainly no adventure novel—although, as a matter of fact, it does tell a tale of adventure about the world itself.

At the heart of Sachs' reasoning is an analysis of sustainable development as a paradigm for understanding the world and as a method for addressing worldwide problems. In other words, Sachs sees sustainable development as a science that can help us to understand the complex systems driving the world we live in and as a set of rules governing the sort of conduct that can create the balance needed to bring about development and wellbeing, rather than destruction.

But what exactly is truly sustainable development? For the author, it's about four objectives which, if we think about it, are objectives shared by any good culture of enterprise, i.e. economic prosperity, social inclusion and cohesion, environmental sustainability, and good governance. These goals become the bases for the entire book, which manages to bring together and explain the work of many disciplines, including economics, demographics, sociology, and climatology. Looking at the data and taking into consideration a variety of points of view (including views contrary to his own), Sachs comes to the challenging—if not catastrophic—conclusion that investing in economic and social justice means investing in efficiency, and he believes there is still time for something to be done.

The Age of Sustainable Development is not to be seen as the “bible” for the coming century, but rather as necessary reading for anyone wanting to better understand what's happening now and what might happen in the future, making it a great book for great leaders.

The Age of Sustainable Development

Jeffrey D. Sachs

Columbia University Press, 2015