

Laszlo Zsolnai
Corvinus University of Budapest and
European SPES Institute, Leuven

Business Responsibility for Future Generations

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Problems

Who are future generations?

**What kind of obligations do we have to
future generations?**

**How can business exercise its responsibility
for future generations?**

Future generations

Future generations are **not yet born** human beings.

People who may live in the **next 200 years**.



The Ethics of Responsibility

The ethics of responsibility involves not only the **existence of future human beings** but also the way they **exist**.

The **conditions** of the **existence** of future generations should not cause their capacity of **freedom** and **humanness** to disappear.



Hans Jonas
(1903-1993)

The position of future generations

We should consider every generation as equal and should not presuppose anything about the preferences of future generations.



Edith Brown Weiss
Georgetown University

Our obligations to future generations

(1) Each generation should be required to **conserve** the **diversity** of the **natural** and **cultural resource base**, so that it does not unduly restrict the options available to future generations in solving their problems.

(2) Each generation should be required to **maintain** the **quality** of the **planet** so that it is passed on in no worse condition than the present generation received it.

(3) Each generation should provide **access** to the **legacy** from **past generations** to future generations.

(Brown Weiss, E. 1989)

Future generations should be considered as a **primordial stakeholder of business**. This obligation should be reflected in the **goals, priorities, policies, and impact assessment practices** of business organizations.

Seventh Generation Inc.

American company that sells **cleaning, paper, and personal care products** designed with **human health** and the **environment** in mind.



The Great Iroquois Law

prescribes **deliberation**
of the **impact** of **all** of
our **activities** on the
next **seven** generations



Seventh Generation is creating **cultural change**
through **shaping consumer behavior** and **business ethics** via authenticity, transparency, and progressiveness



The key problem is the nature, form and scale of business operations. The **business models** of today's mainstream business do not fit in the reality of the biosphere. Business models vary but they are usually **not consistent** with the **flourishing life** on **Earth** (including human, non-human and future life).

To achieve meaningful change in the humanity-nature nexus we have to **reinvent business**. The basic question is how can business become **ecologically conscious agent** which operates **within limits**, that is, uses only its "fair earth share" and contributes to the richness of life on Earth?



Improving the position of future generations enhances the future of the present generations too.

Thank you!