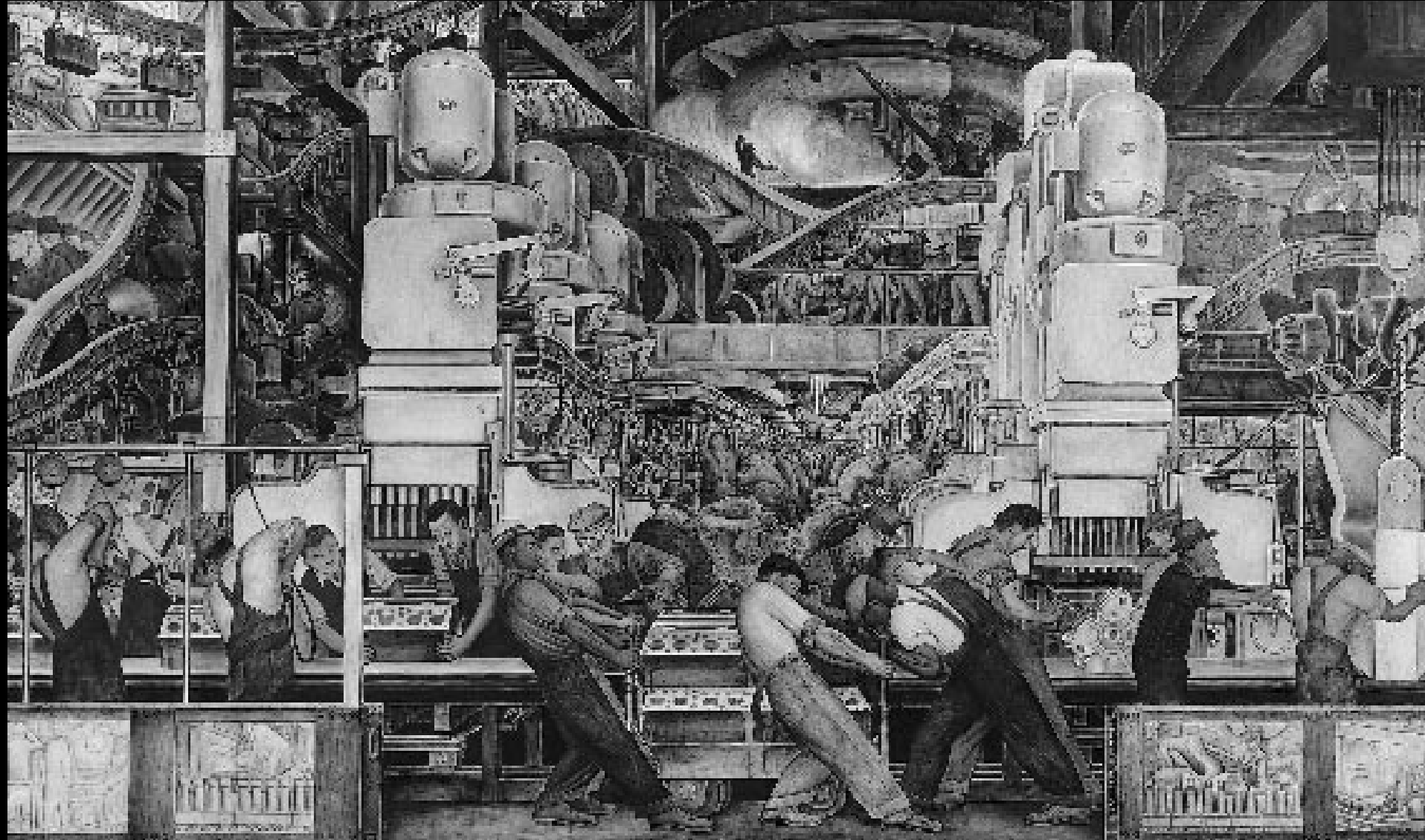




The Copenhagen Centre

the New Economy *of* **Corporate Citizenship**



The Copenhagen Centre (TCC) is an international institution established by the Danish Government in 1998. TCC serves as an intermediary for governments, businesses, social partners, agencies and civil society organisations. Focusing on social responsibility and the inclusion of marginalised groups in society, TCC strives to promote new voluntary social partnerships between business, government and civil society as a means to address social challenges.

TCC's core tasks are to conduct surveys, organise and facilitate networks, publish reports, conduct seminars, workshops and conferences, thereby supporting an international exchange of experience in the field of new social partnerships.

The TCC New Economy Programme Spring 2000, TCC launched a programme to explore the relationship between the New Economy and new social partnerships. Recognizing that the New Economy marks an acceleration of the dynamics underlying both economic progress and the potential for deepened social exclusion, the programme aims to understand challenges and opportunities of the New Economy, particularly with a view to the issues this process raises for the development of new social partnerships.

The programme is based on a collaborative research, publication and dissemination strategy leading up to TCC's forthcoming international conference "Partnerships and Social Responsibility in the New Economy" to take place in Copenhagen 27-29 June 2001.

This pamphlet is the first publication emerging from the TCC New Economy Programme. It provides an overview of the theme, and seeks to frame it in a robust conceptual framework. Supported by illustrations and arguments drawn from researchers and practitioners from around the world, the pamphlet introduces many of the specific topics, for example, disability, privacy, community development and life-long learning.

In a forthcoming volume of essays to be published shortly by TCC, these topics will be presented and assessed in more depth. Convening some of the best thinking in the field the volume will comprise of a series of short essays by analysers and practitioners on the subject of corporate social responsibility and the New Economy, with a particular focus on new social partnerships.

For more information about TCC, The New Economy Programme, to order or download further copies of this pamphlet and the more in-depth volume, please visit TCC's website at www.copenhagencentre.org

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the New Economy of Corporate Citizenship

Social development today is determined by the ability to establish a synergistic interaction between technological innovation and human values, leading to a new set of organizations and institutions that create positive feedback loops between productivity, flexibility, solidarity, safety, participation and accountability, in a new model of development that could be socially and environmentally sustainable.

***MANUEL CASTELLS, Professor, Sociology, City & Regional Planning,
University of California, Berkeley.¹***

In this age of triumphant commercialism, technology – with science as its handmaiden – is delivering a series of almost magical inventions that are the most phenomenally lucrative ever seen. We are aggressively pursuing the promises of these new technologies within the now unchallenged system of global capitalism and its manifold financial incentives and competitive pressures.

BILL JOY, Co-founder of Sun Microsystems²

Visions of the New Economy evoke a spectrum of evangelical, sceptical, and worried cynical responses. For some it is a source of hope that will deliver a safe natural environment secured through 'e-materialisation', progressive innovations in work opportunities and their synergies with family and community, and a democratic renaissance based on technology-enabled, direct citizen participation. For others, it spells out greater insecurity for all, the collapse of geographical communities, the loss of privacy in the personal domain and an acceleration of problematic, global investment, trading patterns and unsustainable material consumption.

Corporate 'citizenship' embraces the growing number of voluntary initiatives by the business community that address social and environmental as well as business aims, increasingly in partnership with civil society organizations and public bodies. Like the New Economy, the vision, practice and outcomes of corporate citizenship are disputed. For some it holds out the hope of mobilising a synergy of competencies and resources from across traditional sectoral boundaries in creating innovative solutions to the challenges of poverty, inequality and environmental insecurity. For others, it is a screen behind which the growing power of global business is thinly shrouded.

Many facts are offered to support both these competing views about the New Economy and corporate citizenship. Practically, they do little to resolve these differing perspectives of how the New Economy or corporate citizenship should best be judged or guided. Equally, the relationship between the New Economy and corporate citizenship has been subject to little serious scrutiny, despite the growing array of corporate, philanthropic initiatives aimed at bridging the so-called digital divide.

This pamphlet is about the underlying relationship between the New Economy and corporate citizenship, particularly new social partnerships. It explores the social and environmental challenges and opportunities posed by the New Economy, and the approaches to corporate citizenship that are enabled or disabled by its emergence.

The paper argues that:

- a. *The New Economy is fundamentally an organisational phenomenon*, characterized by shifts in speed of change; the relevance of knowledge, innovation and communication; and shifting proximity.
- b. *Corporate citizenship is an outcrop of the New Economy* in that companies will take greater account of their impact on society as a business basic, although this does not mean that business behaviour will necessarily be better or worse.
- c. Some powerful elements of the New Economy undermine *good corporate citizenship*, just as others encourage it.
- d. *Civil governance* rooted in new social partnerships will be a, if not the, prime determinant of whether corporate citizenship delivers significant social and environmental gains.

The New Economy as an Organisational Revolution

There are many definitions of the New Economy on offer, generally rather polemical and normative rather than descriptive or analytic. A typically narrow description would place the internet and the dot.com phenomenon at the centre of the changes, or else define the New Economy as a sustained growth in productivity. Broader views see the New Economy as no less than a socio-economic revolution that impacts on all aspects of our relationships with others and ourselves. Most definitions, as the 'first great philosopher of cyberspace', Manuel Castells points out, imply radical changes in the nature of the institutions of the state and business, and redefines the roles of the citizen, both individually and collectively – for example, as employee, consumer, investor, parent and voter.³

There are conflicting views as to the balance of costs and benefits of the New Economy. John Samuels, argues that the "... delusions of development, wealth and participation [*features of the New Economy*] they create

will not effectively change the ground realities of inequality, mistrust, social paranoia and moral degeneration".⁴ Tom Cavenagh sums up the views of New Economy enthusiasts in arguing that "... this new frictionless economy will produce an unparalleled rise in living standards and human potential for all of society's members".⁵

Three characteristics help explain the nature of the New Economy. The first is the *speed of change*. As Wim Duisenberg, the President of the European Central Bank, explains, "What appears to be meant by the New Economy is that the speed limits of the economy have increased".⁶ The accuracy of Moores' Law, that the processing power of silicon chips will double every 18 months, is testimony to this rapid acceleration.⁷ But this characteristic is not purely a technological phenomenon. In business, there has been an acceleration, for example, in the product innovation cycle, in the pace of change of brand recognition, and in share trading velocity.⁸ In the personal and broader social spheres, similarly, there have been extraordinary increases in the speed of how communities evolve, and the pace and nature of development of visual and verbal language. This acceleration is of course not geographically, culturally or in any other way uniform. We all straddle the past and present as if we are virtual time travellers and so face the challenge of understanding and integrating the old with the new.

The second characteristic of the New Economy is the increased importance of *knowledge, innovation and communication* in the creation and sustaining of economic, and also social and environmental wealth. As Business Week concluded, "The turn of the millennium is a turn from hamburgers to software. Software is an idea; hamburger is a cow".⁹ Knowledge is the asset and basis upon which the performance of companies in the New Economy will be understood. Economic wealth is located increasingly at higher points in the life-cycle, towards the image and social meaning of the product rather than its production; Interbrand estimates that one-quarter of the world's total financial wealth is tied up in a single part of a company's intangible assets – *brand value*.¹⁰ It is for this reason that there is an increasing recognition within the business community of the importance of building long-term relationships with key stakeholders, notably customers.

The third characteristic of the New Economy is *shifting proximity*. As an OECD report puts it, "The 'death of distance' that is intrinsic to information networking is probably the most important economic force shaping society at the dawn of the 21st century".¹¹ Tele-working across time zones will be the future norm for working successfully in the New Economy, whether one is a high-paid knowledge-worker or a low-paid telephonist answering customer queries from across the world. Tele-working, for example, is predicted to underpin the work patterns of 50% of the UK working population by 2010, a dramatic increase from the roughly one million people in 1999.¹²

The same communication technologies underpin a new generation of campaigning challenges to the world's leading companies, as witnessed from the streets of Seattle and Prague through to the words of the self-styled 'no logo' guru, Naomi Klein. Shifting proximity in a sense puts 'diversity' centre stage. The 'workspace' increasingly reflects the extraordinary breadth of communities from which expertise is being drawn, whether disabled, Christian fundamentalist, or the aged. As one commentator puts it, 'Mighty is the Mongrel'. But the 'death of distance' may also be disabling. For example, new technology may keep disabled people in their homes because of the opportunity for them to work and shop through their computers, thereby reducing even further the need for people without disabilities to deal with their fears and bigotries through direct interactions.¹³

The New Economy is an organisational revolution. It embraces increased volatility and insecurity, shorter term and contingent careers and jobs, and shifts the basis on which people interact with each other as individuals and communities. But it also opens up amazing opportunities for generating economic wealth, and indeed social and environmental gains. The New Economy, like all social phenomena, does not therefore create *necessary* goods or bads, but rather new patterns of possible outcomes that need to be variously pursued and offset, which is where corporate citizenship comes of age.

Corporate Citizenship in the New Economy

Corporate citizenship is an essential feature of the New Economy. Corporate citizenship is about businesses taking account of their total impact on society and the natural environment. Successful companies in the New Economy will engage effectively with key stakeholders in the markets for goods and services, finance, labour and political patronage. Corporate citizenship implies a strategy that moves from a focus on short-term transaction to longer-term, values-based relationships with these stakeholders. This is exactly what one would expect in the New Economy, where loyalty will be based on a company's ability to build a sense of shared values and mission with key stakeholders.

But there is catch in this argument. Corporate citizenship may indeed be a *necessary* outcome of the New Economy; but that does not mean that such citizenship *necessarily* produces socially desirable outcomes. Taking stakeholders into account does not automatically translate into 'doing good things'.

Peoples' fear of insecure life-styles feed many forms of discriminatory behaviour. Enhanced mass communication can breed populist antagonism towards refugees, the unemployed, disabled people, and other disadvantaged groups. Surgically differentiated consumer markets offer opportunities for branding based on less-than-ethical factors in peoples' desires and self-image. What may, for example, seem like a website providing information on parenting turns out to endorse Polaroid pictures as a 'good way' of promoting self-esteem in children.¹⁴ Dietary control food stuffs, home security systems, small weapons, and bottled water are fast growing consumer markets. They are all fed by social and environmental fractures, yet none seek in any way to 'fix' the problems they reflect and profit from.

Invasion of privacy is a further key area of concern regarding less scrupulous corporate practices. With e-commerce, the balance of information between purchaser and seller is reversed, with the purchaser handing over personal information in order to buy, without knowing much about

the company they are purchasing from.¹⁵ Companies can also obtain information from prospective consumers through the information provided by an electronic cookie placed in personal computers that tracks consumer preferences by the websites they visit.¹⁶

The New Economy offers many opportunities for businesses to behave unethically, to drive down labour standards, to minimize their tax contributions, to exert undue influence over governments anxious to attract their investments and the job opportunities they bring with them. Similarly, the New Economy offers ample scope for business to market ethical products, deepen their commitment to employees' quality of life and advocate socially and environmentally-friendly public policy, and can enable companies to demonstrate their ethical credentials to protect and strengthen their brand, reputation, and overall license to operate. Corporate citizenship – a company's acquisition of, and response to, in-depth information about people's values, fantasies and interests – does not in itself guarantee 'good' behaviour or outcomes. Social and environmental outcomes resulting from corporate citizenship in practice depend on what aspects of stakeholders' values and concerns business choose to respond to and encourage in designing strategy and practice.

What Makes Corporate Citizenship Good?

Increasingly evidence suggests that people 'care more'. International opinion polls suggest that people are increasingly willing to discriminate in favour of products that are demonstrably 'ethical' and to punish companies in the market for being demonstrably 'bad'.¹⁷ Employees, particularly those with skills much in demand, can be seen to look for employers that treat their employees well, do good in the community, and protect the environment.¹⁸ Increasingly pension holders are willing to invest in socially and environmentally screened funds.

This apparent increase in caring is underpinned by the three main characteristics of the New Economy, speed of change, knowledge and communication, and shifting proximity. Communication technology and the mass media, for example, has made it easier to pipe easy-to-

digest information about global poverty into the homes of wealthier citizens, including actual and alleged business behaviour. The rising power of civil society organisations like NGOs, similarly, can be attributed to the strengthened voice they acquire through the New Economy dynamics.

People *do* in certain situations care more. But this is rarely because of some moral Damascus or evolution in human consciousness. Rather, it results from specific aspects of the New Economy:

- a. *Increased information and knowledge* driven by technological and organisational change.
- b. *Alignment of caring with core life-style decisions* – choosing ethical brands – as consumer, employee, investor or voter – is an expression of increased choice for those with economic weight.
- c. *Increased empathy for the troubles of others* by those with market power because of increased fears about the prospects for their, and their family and friends, own sources of income and overall security.

So people can care more as part of the underlying dynamics of the New Economy. But as always, the New Economy has varied and conflicting effects. It can equally increase people's empathy for the plight of others, as well as increase their fear, anger, resentment, and xenophobia. Crime, drug abuse, and racism have in reality accelerated in the New Economy. Business opportunities emerge in this context that reduce empathy between people, whether from the mundane burglar alarm systems through to the life-style products that reinforce images of beauty, health and nationalism.

Corporate citizenship – like the New Economy itself – can just as easily reinforce unethical tendencies in society as it can seek to promote broadly universal values. Achieving *good* corporate citizenship therefore requires more than just waiting for the New Economy to play itself out. Specific policies and actions are required to get the best from the New Economy. It is in this context that we turn to the matter of partnerships.

Partnership Boom

The partnership boom is a further predictable outcrop of the New Economy. The world has become too complex and interdependent for any one institution or sector to effectively respond to today's business or wider challenges and opportunities. Companies come together to drill for oil or to share airline codes; NGOs join forces to campaign for new legislation to secure environmental improvements; and Governments join with each other variously to fight wars and provide humanitarian aid. There are a host of new forms of cross-sector collaboration between public institutions, businesses, and NGOs. Some of these operate in specific communities, whilst others are high-level partnerships designed to function at national and international levels.

Like corporate citizenship, partnerships can create positive and negative outcomes. Partnerships can and do deliver significant social and environmental gains. Equally, mergers, alliances and partnerships between companies, and indeed between business and governments, can lead to downsizing, redundancies, and lower and unstable income streams for those remaining in employment. What needs exploring, therefore, are the conditions under which partnerships explicitly set out to, and secure, social and environmental gains, and what this means for corporate citizenship in the New Economy.

Civil Governance in the New Economy

Partnerships are in essence evolving, organic sets of inter-related governance structures and processes. Where these are partnerships between businesses, they can be treated in much the traditional way in which issues of monopoly power have been handled, although recent multi-sector alliances dilute the relevance of these forms of government oversight. Partnerships between business, government and civil society organizations are, however, an entirely different matter when it comes to governance.

- a. Their basis of *legitimacy* is often extremely potent (although also contested), incorporating for example the trust afforded civil society and labour organizations and governments.
- b. The diverse *access to networks and relationships* afforded, for example through NGOs, increases the ability of the partnership to enter into areas of society historically closed to the business community.
- c. The combining of organisational *cultures and competencies* enhance the ability of the partnership to initiate new forms of activities that develop into an almost seamless pattern of commercial and non-commercial interests and outcomes.

The Copenhagen Centre calls these **new social partnerships**, which it defines as “People and organisations from some combination of public, business, and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships and activities to address common societal aims”.¹⁹

Such partnerships are an evolution of two existing forms of relationship between business, government and civil society. The first is the more cut-and-thrust forms of civil regulation, often involving public pressure by civil society organizations through high-profile campaigning. Secondly, new social partnerships are supplanting the traditional social partnership, particularly between business, labour and the state.

Both are evolving into new forms of institutionalised, rule-based frameworks. NGOs cut-and-thrust campaigning exists hand-in-hand with increasing numbers of long-term agreements with specific businesses. Traditional social partnerships, similarly are gradually making way for more complex, dynamic and transitory forms of collaboration emerging in the New Economy.

At local levels, new social partnerships are forming part of the engine of innovation in addressing deeply-rooted social challenges such as in the Digital Divide. For example, TARahaat, an Indian public/private partnership claims to have the ability to connect 250,000 villages to the Inter-

net, give subsistence farmers a better price, and for these arrangements to be profitable to investors.²⁰ At an international level, initiatives like the Global Compact, the Forest Stewardship Council and the Global Reporting Initiative are creating de facto, non-statutory regulatory environments, albeit fairly loosely framed at this stage in their development.

The rules emerging from these processes and initiatives may and should in some instances find their way onto the statute books. However, many will be overseen by diverse configurations of new social partnerships. For example, companies increasingly seek to reduce risk by linking their codes to partnerships that involve human rights and development NGOs.²¹ Similarly, in addressing the issue of privacy in the New Economy, Trust Marks are now emerging that follow the pattern of new social partnerships as a tool for self-regulation. Nsafe is a Norwegian on-line business certification and self-declaration system for the Internet shopping process from businesses to consumers. The system consists of a seal, a Code of Conduct, directory of seal holders based on self-declaration, a web site and an appeal board called eNemada, all joined into one system.²²

Civil governance clearly does not carry the weight and direct implications of statutory law. At the same time, it has, or can have, a number of characteristics that take the position of the company beyond both ‘self-regulation’ and the early stages of civil regulation.

- a. It involves rules that the companies involved agree to abide by.
- b. The rules are overseen by institutional structures and processes that involve non-commercial organizations, and increasingly government and international bodies.
- c. It includes systems of penalties and rewards for non-compliance, although to date these remain poorly defined.

Civil governance – and so new social partnerships – lies at the heart of the New Economy of good corporate citizenship. Civil governance is key to the development of rules within and around the market that governments,

NGOs and labour organisations find acceptable, and against which business is willing to be held to account. It institutionalises the chaotic and often transitory civil regulatory challenges that NGOs and other organizations are able to mobilize through popular and generally negative campaigning. Finally, it deepens the learning processes within companies, and also other constituencies, that act to shift their understanding of the issues and how best to be able to address them effectively within the competitive thrust of the global market place.

The New Economy of Corporate Citizenship

The New Economy is neither a moral crusade nor does it come with guarantees of creating ethical outcomes. It is, however, shorthand for a radical shift in how we organize ourselves, how economic wealth is created, and how relationships work between individuals, institutions and communities. In breaking down old habits and patterns, much will be lost, but equally much can be gained.

The New Economy offers real opportunities for re-building many of the rules within which we live. Businesses will increasingly align their products and services towards consumers, employees, communities, investors and indeed governments and international bodies that share underlying values and aspirations. These relationships will stabilise through long-term partnerships that have a credibility underpinned by the involvement of businesses, civil and labour organisations, Governments and international institutions. Far from being merely 'efficient ways of getting things done', these new social partnerships will develop, frame and often oversee many of the new rules that govern business and also NGO and government behaviour.

New social partnerships will therefore embody both the best and the worst of corporate citizenship in the New Economy. At worst, they will promote and legitimize approaches to business that secure financial performance on the back of very narrow or indeed non-existent social and environmental gains. At best, they can be the vanguard of radical approaches to resolving deeply-rooted dimensions of poverty, social inequality and environmental insecurity.

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