

Sustainability: The Real Challenge (brief abstract)

Human beings are a recent evolutionary arrival, having appeared in Africa some 150,000 years ago. Compared with the other mammals on those plains, we were not a very impressive animal in number, size, speed, strength or sensory acuity. Our great advantage was the brain which endowed us with memory, curiosity, creativity. I believe our ability to conceive of a future that enabled us to look ahead, recognize dangers and opportunities, then deliberately chart a path into the future, was our evolutionary advantage. Foresight enabled us to rocket to a position of dominance. We are now the most numerous mammal on Earth and with technology, consumptive demand and a global economy, we are altering the biological, physical and chemical features of the planet on a geological scale. Today we have all the amplified predictive ability of scientists, computers, engineers and telecommunication and for over 40 years, they have been telling us we are heading along a dangerous path. Yet now, we are turning our backs on the very strategy that got us to a position of dominance. Why are we no longer paying attention to our predictions? I will discuss some of the reasons and suggest what is needed to get off the destructive path and onto a path of sustainability.