



# Conversations for a Life Economy:

## A Toolkit

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# Overview of Project

The climate crisis requires us to shift our economic systems to new modes, prioritizing the best interests of people and the planet. Leaders dedicated to that goal have emerged in all sectors of society. The toolkit grows out of a partnership between the charity [Reboot the Future](#) and the [Institute for Ecological Civilization](#). Its goal is to foster dialogues between change agents and business leaders that explore ways our societies can realize a [life economy](#). Our collaboration is based on the conviction that conversations have the power to transform the world, connecting people to their core values, their communities, and the planet.

Together we created the project “[Conversations for a Life Economy](#)”, a series of dialogues meant to close the gap between personal experience and public action. These discussions shift the narrative about climate change and inequality from crisis management to sustained, collaborative efforts for a better future. Our partnership with Reboot the Future has enabled us to bring together renowned speakers like Heerad Sabeti, CEO of the Fourth Sector Group; Charmian Love, Co-Founder of B Lab UK; and Rob Holzer, Founder of Matter Unlimited.

Our aims and goals for this project were and continue to be engaging leaders in transformational conversations that help the transition towards a [life economy](#).

## 23 Leaders engaged

- For the project we engaged **23 leaders across business, private industry, government, and the non-profit sector** to convene for public discussions. These public conversations are available to all and you can watch the full series [here](#). The project also features one-on-one conversations with individuals leading the life economy via our podcast series available on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcast](#).

## 8 public panel discussions

- From October of 2021 to March 2022 **8 public panel discussions were held, 4 of which were held in-person at COP 26**, the 2021 UN Climate Conference in Glasgow.

## 90 Business Leaders and 22 young change makers

- **90 business leaders and 22 young changemakers** were engaged through the 6 private discussions hosted by Reboot the Future on the themes of Deep Time and our connection with the natural world.

# Introduction

You and I are part of a community more than seven billion people strong, existing on a planet that is crying out for help. Many of us feel helpless, unable to tackle the overwhelming challenges that increasingly present themselves as the world around us grows more uncertain. Conversations for a Life Economy began as a way to reconnect with ourselves, each other, and the world around us. To engage in deep reflection requires conversation and connecting with others, asking questions that provoke ideas about how we can move through the world in ways that are harmonious with each other and the planet.

This project grows out of applications of both the [Golden Rule](#) and the Principles for a Life Economy. Both

emphasize the dimensions of our understanding that we respond to our environment and our environment responds to us. But most importantly, one message that's threaded between these ideas is how we can engage in a positive, healthy, and reciprocal manner towards all sentient life, treating others and the planet as we wish to be treated. The Golden Rule frames this thought on an individual level, while the concept of the Life Economy creates a holistic application of this understanding, incorporating dimensions of our economic systems and business models into the philosophy.

To deepen our understanding, let's frame and define some of the ideas that will further be explored within this toolkit by posing a question:

## What is a Life Economy?

### Why is it an important concept?

Our current way of life can best be described as existing on a continuum with visions and realities on antagonistic ends of a spectrum. One is known as a Death Economy and the other is understood as a Life Economy. The difference between the two arises from the conditions that animate them. American author John Perkins describes the Life Economy as a system of doing that fosters mutually beneficial relationships between human activities and the environment, driven by the goal of maximizing long-term benefits for both people and the planet (Perkins). Conversely, economists Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman describe the Death Economy as a system that “maximize[s] short-term owner profits, regardless of the social and environmental costs” (as quoted in [Perkins](#)).

As it stands, our lifestyles and behaviors play an important role in how we decide to move through the world, whether we can be in harmony with the people and entities around us, and how we actively employ the Golden Rule. One aspect of this recognition is by

understanding our responsibility to act to bring about change. This includes action through our consumer habits, as well as impactful and far-reaching action through our businesses. Understanding the role we play in this space is crucial to changing our fundamental way of constructing economic systems. We want to embark on this journey in an effort to better serve people around the world and our planet. But this starts with you.

This toolkit serves as a springboard for you, and the people around you, to consider how we can be more present, and respond through action in order to treat the world the way we want to be treated. Each page will outline a theme that was uncovered during our panel discussions around these topics. Each will feature a leader who is engaged in business ventures that align with the spirit of a Life Economy, and each will offer additional resources to help you lead through action. We hope that sharing these insights will bring us closer together in conversation, catalyzing a wider movement to change our way of life toward that of a Life Economy.

*“The light isn’t Wall Street. I think the light are the social intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs, impact investors, the people whose consciousness has been awakened enough, in whatever discipline and position they’re in, and who are seeing a new way of doing things. I think that’s the light.”*

- Heerad Sabeti, CEO of The Fourth Sector Group

# Business Models in a Life Economy

## Theme 1 Ethical Values Are the Foundation of Business Sustainability

Our current moment in history is marked by various changes in the global economy and our societies. The pandemic produced a particular attitudinal shift that initiated droves of individuals to deeply evaluate their personal relationship to their work and their work’s impact in the world. Traditionally, certain values in private industry have informed the standard for how businesses should operate, with an emphasis on both company and shareholder profit maximization. With new developments in our understanding of climate change and its relationship to human behaviors, we now know that these traditions of business are unsustainable. This raises the question: *What will business look like in an economic system that is more in line with a Life Economy?*

Throughout the project, a number of attributes stood out to be the most crucial for a business model that engages a Life Economy ethos. Here are some of the key attributes that emerged:

- Values that are ethical and altruistic in principle should serve as the foundation of a business’s mission.
- Ethical values should be shared between leaders, management, and employees.
- Passion and compassion should be at the heart of all business decisions. This should determine how to support the wellbeing of employees and consider business impact in the world.

**Why are these crucial?** In a Life Economy, imagine that individuals are motivated by doing good not only for themselves but also for others. In principle, it’s a great start. In practice, the positive ripple effects become too overwhelming to ignore. Businesses become vessels of altruism, operating in service of people and the planet. Recognizing the long-term impacts of businesses on the world around them fosters an opportunity to understand their added value in the new Life Economy. Employees and management are granted an opportunity to experience a sense of fulfillment from real positive impact in the world. This increases the likelihood of sustained support in business efforts, resulting from a committed team with a shared vision. Businesses such as these, ones that adopt this purpose-led, value-led model, are more likely to sustain business operations and stable profits over the long-term.

Let’s investigate this idea further on a personal level through these self-guided questions.

### Reflection Questions

Take a moment to think and journal about the following:

- What does a “life economy” mean to you?
- What are the deepest values that drive your work?



# Rob Holzer

Featured Panelists Leading the Life Economy



**Rob Holzer** is a recognized visionary leader in the marketing world with over 20 years leading agencies. He is a founding member of The Civic Nation Creative Alliance, a group created by The White House under President Obama and continuing now with President Biden, which connects key social initiatives to the United State's top creative talent.

## About Matter Unlimited:

In 2011 Rob founded Matter Unlimited, a pioneering creative and strategic consulting agency, to drive positive lasting change in the world by leveraging the power of advertising, digital marketing, and creative storytelling. Matter Unlimited helped define the Purpose Economy and over the past ten years has created award-winning work for clients including Nike, Abbott, Merck, UNICEF, The Obama Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, ABC/Disney, Kimpton Hotels and TED, among many others.

[Learn More about Matter Unlimited Here](#)

*"I grew up on a small island off the west coast of Scotland where the weather was dramatic and very present. I had a rich connection with the valley I grew up in and still dream about it several times a year. So I had this almost transcendental connection to it, and it's deeply ingrained within me. I grew up with the notion that the environment was something to which harm can be done. It almost helps to personify it. Think of it as using James Lovelock's concept of Gaia. The biosphere is a living thing that can be harmed, and it is being harmed."*

- Fergus Bruce, Co-Founder of After the Pandemic

# Perceptions of the Natural World in a Life Economy

## Theme 2 A Relationship with Nature as a Personal Value

As the world becomes more globalized, our connection to nature weakens. However, ancient wisdom embedded in the fabric of our DNA continues to remind us that as humans, our relationship to nature is never severed or forgotten. Science-based research has confirmed that time in nature is restorative, transformative, and healing. A stroll through a wooded forest or along the beach can reduce our feelings of stress and anxiety in an increasingly fast and overwhelming modern world.

For many throughout the conversations, reflecting on their personal relationship to nature unlocked key revelations in understanding why the environment needs our support and protection. Various speakers had deeply spiritual experiences in nature. For some it was growing up surrounded by an overwhelmingly natural space, left untouched by modernization. For others, this spiritual experience was a moment of stepping away into nature, either by performing a daily ritual in the natural world, or by finding themselves totally present to the lull of waves lapping on the beach, leaving them completely in awe of the vastness and magnitude of the ocean. These experiences personify the world. They create threads

of connection, a relationship to the environment established during moments of deep stillness and presence. For many, these moments were an epiphany, one that produced a shared understanding that our current attitudes towards nature in the modern world are flawed.

One particular belief, repeatedly articulated as harmful to the natural world, pertains to dominant business culture and the notion that the environment is an abundant resource with an infinite supply. In truth, the natural world operates in a delicate equilibrium; it responds -- often negatively -- to the actions applied to it in excess by human behaviors, often at the hands of corporate businesses. As the planet hurts, we see communities affected in kind. Communities are destroyed by drought and famine. Homes where families are raised are washed away by torrential rains and rising sea levels. Magnificent forests that harbor stories of generations are ravaged by fires, taking those stories with them as they burn. If we take too much from nature, nature can no longer provide. We now recognize the relationship between ourselves and the environment as akin to our own interpersonal connections.

In a Life Economy, our relationship with nature is palpable and has value. The planet is personified and communicates with us through natural events that allow us to observe and respond accordingly. In our current moment in time, we are left to ponder: *How can we reframe and rebuild this relationship to nature in ways that are healthy and beneficial to all parties involved?*

*In what concrete ways can we express that the natural world is of value to us?*

*How can we move beyond our current state of conflict, practicing behaviors that nurture the environment and ourselves?*

Let's investigate this idea further on a personal level through these self-guided questions.

## Reflection Questions

Take a moment to think and journal about the following:

- Where do you feel most free in nature?
- What is holding you back or stopping your connection with nature?
- What relationship would you like to create with nature? How might you start?



## Ornella de la Campa

Featured Panelists Leading the Life Economy



**Ornella de la Campa** is the founder of Open Studios and has extensive experience in international business development. Ornella previously worked at luxury fashion house Oscar de la Renta and developed creative strategy projects for The Economist and its lifestyle magazine 1843.

## About Open Studios

Open Studios is a platform that connects independent designers and small brands to sustainable manufacturers worldwide. The Open Studios platform provides business plans that easily mediate information and profiles to identify potential matches in production needs and services between designers and manufacturers. The platform also offers designers and manufacturers secure messaging functions to discuss products and potential collaborations.

[Learn More about Open Studios Here](#)

*"I love young people in youth activism because it's so simple. It's no more 'Blah blah blah'. It's 'climate justice now'. They're very simple statements. I hate how we over complicate everything. I think we talk in really big words and we talk in really big concepts. We don't actually put any action behind it. I think that's where it starts. It starts with listening to young people. You go out in the streets, you go to any climate march, they will tell you exactly what they need in their communities and tell you exactly what you need to do. It's about how we turn that into solutions. I think the clarity originates with young people having positions of power. You look around the table, and particularly at COP, and it's pale, male, and stale. It's been the same for so long. Enough is enough. Ask Indigenous communities what they need, they'll tell you how to start climate action and how to improve their lives. Ask a community like PossilPark what climate justice means to them and they'll tell you 'We don't have enough green space, we don't have access to resources and infrastructure that would enable us to live. It's actually our daily lives.' We need to strip it back to communities."*

- Denisha Killoh, Trustee of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland

# Fostering Connection in a Life Economy

## Theme 3 Transforming Socio-Economic Conditions by Building Relationships

In the previous theme, we discussed rekindling our connection to nature and how we can do this by personifying the natural world and recognizing its sentience to mitigate harm. We understand that one's personal relationship with nature alone is not enough to completely transform systems of injustice to our planet and communities that are affected by climate change. Let's view change on the individual level as a key starting point – one that encourages a journey towards building relationships with others as a way to amplify our actions and impact for good.

Over the course of this project, we've held conversations that foster cross-cultural discussions with individuals across varying industries and sectors. We noted repeatedly that personal values create bridges to connection, then gradually build up to larger movements and actions towards systems change. Systems change remains a critical component to transition from our current way of doing business, and engaging with communities and the environment, to one that reflects conditions of a Life Economy.

So one may ask: *Why are relationships integral to the transformation to a Life Economy?*

Identifying our personal values in others allows us to see where coalitions and movements of solidarity and support can be built. In a Life Economy, all communities are offered a seat at the table because we recognize that all communities will be affected by climate change in the years to follow. Relationships allow us to build a culture of collaboration that works towards climate and economic solutions, to engage diversity of thought in how we create results, and to lift up those that have been left behind. More importantly, these relationships build our influence in changing the current paradigm and help us reconcile differences about how we should move forward. They offer a global community, a network that recognizes power in numbers and in the diversity of thought and experience, and allow us to apply these strengths to a problem-solving framework towards systems change.

Let's investigate this idea further on a personal level through these self-guided questions.

## Reflection Questions

Take a moment to think and journal about the following:

- What is the very earliest sense you ever had of the values that have been basic to you throughout your life?
- Can you think of an example of when you felt strongly guided by your values as a child?
- How do you want to care for others and the planet? How do your values guide you in making these decisions?



## Mayamiko Nkoloma

Featured Panelists Leading the Life Economy



**Mayamiko Nkoloma** is a Lecturer in Telecommunications at the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences and CEO of iMoSyS. Mayamiko is using his extensive knowledge and experience in Telecommunications and computer programming to provide solutions through which reliable, affordable, and current ICT services can be implemented to meet the communication needs of developing countries.

## About iMoSyS

iMoSyS is a growing Malawian tech company that's developing and deploying (IoT) applications that enable connectivity for remote monitoring of industrial processes, infrastructure, and the environment. iMoSyS focuses on creating solutions to a variety of issue areas in development, particularly with a focus on environmental health monitoring and evaluation. iMoSyS is revolutionizing drinking water conditions and water access in Malawi through the pioneering and development of a network of smartwater management systems. These smartwater management systems are being adopted by water utility companies across the nation.

[Learn More about iMoSyS Here](#)



## Vanessa Arelle

Featured Panelists Leading the Life Economy



**Vanessa Arelle** is a social entrepreneur focused on cultural strategy, developing frameworks, innovative spaces, dialogue, ecosystems, and connections. Since 2020, Vanessa serves as Chief Strategy Officer at BuffaloGrid, an organization working in connectivity to bring digital prosperity to the unconnected and underserved with their StreamSpot+ technology and service.

### About StreamSpot+ and BuffaloGrid

StreamSpot+ by BuffaloGrid offers off-grid technological services for downloadable educational and other digital content to communities in low-resource and low-technology areas. StreamSpot+ works in collaboration with solar panel-powered hardware units called hubs from BuffaloGrid. The BuffaloGrid hardware hubs support a number of services, including providing a centralized digital space that can serve as a mobile charging station or be used to download pre-uploaded content.

[Learn More about StreamSpot+ and BuffaloGrid Here](#)

*“There are levers that we need to pull in order to drive systems change. Some of those levers are regular policy levers. Some of them are culture levers. Systems change isn’t one of the things where one says, ‘Here’s the button, you push, and job done.’ There’s a range of different interventions that are going to be needed, and the coordination of pulling all those levers at the same time to make the change happen is the job that needs to get done. It’s not enough for just one organization to pull that lever. It’s rusted in place. You can’t get it to move because it’s so embedded in how our current models are working. The only way I think we’re going to be able to get those levers pulled is by recognizing who’s working on policy, who’s working on culture change, who’s working on reinventing business education, and then getting them to coordinate and all put their hands on that lever at the same time and pull.”*

- **Charmian Love**, Co-Founder and Activist in Residence at B Lab UK

# Interconnectedness and Action in a Life Economy

## Theme 4 Systems Change by Engaging Multiple Levels of Influence

In today’s age, the pervasiveness of complex foreign policy, an ever-increasing number of transnational corporations, and rapid technological advancements as a result of globalization make us jarringly aware that our modern way of life is undeniably interconnected. With this understanding, it’s clear that action towards any type of systems change requires the effort of various organizational entities and communities. As we have seen, systems change remains a crucial component of making the transition towards a Life Economy.

Among participants in this project, a common criticism of current efforts towards a more equitable and sustainable future was that decisions at the highest level often exclude communities with the most insight. As explored in the previous theme, legitimate systems change requires coalitions and partnerships between multiple parties in order to effect change at scale. In our interconnected world, movements cannot operate in silos. Action needs to be collaborative and strategic.

In a Life Economy, we see how these movements can be engaged at multiple levels. On the personal level, we see individuals implementing small changes of habit in order to take responsibility and participate in bringing about change within their immediate surroundings. Within grassroots movements, activists are mobilizing individuals at the community level. At the institutional level, we see governments and businesses employing policy changes that consider impacts on communities and the environment. The hope is to create dialogue across all three levels. Governments and businesses are most effective when they consult communities, since communities represent the visions and values of individuals. They are all interconnected, threaded together by a similar pursuit of and vision for the future.

We end this toolkit with a vision of looking forward into the future and a call to action.

## Reflection Questions

Take a moment to think about the following questions to investigate this theme further:

- In what ways do you believe you could express “values for a life economy” in your work?
- What changes do you hope to bring about in your sector and in the world?
- What would success look like in your wildest dreams?



## Monica Schüldt

Featured Panelists Leading the Life Economy



**Monica Schüldt** is Co-Founder of Ecocide Law Alliance and an independent management consultant with over 30 years of experience. Three years ago, she saw Greta Thunberg give her first public speech and began to wake up to the climate and ecological crisis. Since then, she has more or less left paid work to support the Fridays for Future global youth movement started by Greta Thunberg. She is now protecting nature by working so that mass destruction of the environment will be designated an international crime, ecocide.

## About Ecocide Law Alliance

Ecocide Law Alliance is a foundation working to initiate change at the highest level by making ecocide an international crime. The organization engages businesses with the aims of collaborating with governments and policymakers to create guidelines for sustainable business practices. By way of policy and organizing, the Ecocide Law Alliance is looking to push for an international consensus on ecocide legislation.

[Learn More about Ecocide Law Alliance Here](#)



## Gib Bulloch

Featured Panelists Leading the Life Economy



**Gib Bulloch** is an award-winning social entrepreneur who consults, writes, and speaks about the role of business in society. Gib comes from a successful business career that has included time with British Petrol, Mars, and some 20 years with Accenture, where he founded the Accenture Development Partnerships, which won multiple Accenture international awards for Corporate Social Responsibility. He is also author of the highly acclaimed book, *The Intrapreneur: Confessions of a Corporate Insurgent*.

## About Craigberoch

Craigberoch Business Decelerator is an initiative positioned at the nexus of business, the arts, wellbeing, and the natural environment. The Decelerator is a space “where people and ideas can flourish.” It features a variety of programs where professionals who are vested in the interest of doing good through business can connect with each other and the natural world. The Decelerator Lab and Co-being Residencies are two keystone programs that bring change agents and professionals from diverse backgrounds together to investigate the new direction of work, and how to integrate social and environmental wellbeing into business.

[Learn More about Craigberoch Here](#)

# Additional Resources

## General Readings/Recommendations and Briefings about Sustainable Business

- [G20's Article on ESG Recommendations for Business and Sustainable Impact](#)
- [Wellbeing Economy Alliance \(WeAll\) Briefing Papers and Videos Discussing Determinants of Wellbeing Economies](#)

## Blogs, News, and Updates

- [Aspen Institute Climate Change Articles](#)
- [Environtec Technology for the Environment Magazine](#)

## Coalitions and Initiatives

- [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#)
- [Climate Justice Alliance](#)
- [B Lab Global](#)

## Courses & Training

- [International Finance Corporation | World Bank Group ESG Resources for Companies](#)
- [International Finance Corporation | World Bank Group ESG Tools and E-Learning Training for Clients](#)
- [Corporate Finance Institute Introduction to ESG Online Course](#)

## Additional Readings for Personal Reflection and Healthy Environmental Relationships

- [Values for a Life Economy](#)
- [Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)
- [Imaginal Cells Visions of Transformation curated by Kim Polman and Stephen Vasconcellos-Sharpe](#)

## REFERENCES

- Perkins, John. "Out With Predatory Capitalism, In With a 'Life Economy.'" YES!, 16 Sept. 2020, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/09/16/pandemic-capitalism-life-economy>.