



Beyond the Bottom Line: Socially Innovative Business Owners

Jack Quarter

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Quarter examines business owners who use their firms as laboratories for social innovation. After providing an introduction to this phenomenon in an historical perspective and discussing the 19th-century British industrialist Robert Owen, he provides 11 case studies of contemporary innovators from six countries—the UK, US, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, and New Zealand.

The case studies fall into two broad groups. The first involves business people who promote innovative ownership and decision-making strategies such as donating their shares to a trust and thereby creating a company without shareholders so that employees can assume greater control; creating a worker co-operative; and transferring ownership to employees through an employee stock ownership plan. The second group of case studies involves innovative efforts at changing the relationship to the surrounding community through creating socially and environmentally responsible businesses. Quarter concludes by looking at the potential and limitations of this phenomenon for building a social movement. A provocative look at the social organization of work that will be of interest to scholars and researchers of industrial organization and to business leaders examining innovative ownership arrangements.

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