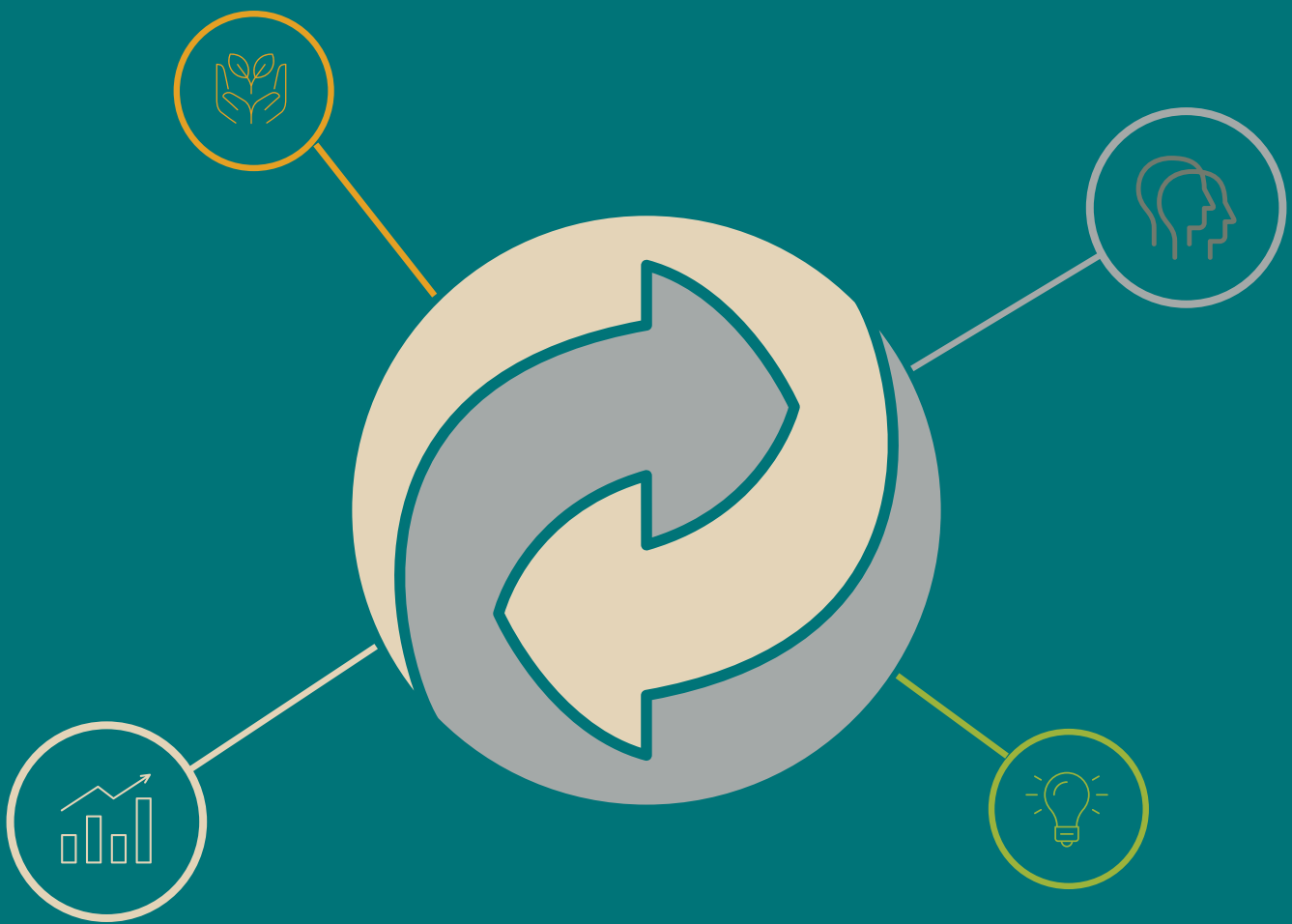


WHITE PAPER

SPACES FOR DIGNITY:

HOW AFRICAN BUSINESSES AND BUSINESS
SCHOOLS CAN CULTIVATE REGENERATIVE
PRACTICES THAT UNLOCK ABUNDANCE

BY DR ROZE PHILLIPS



**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
Centre for
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List of abbreviation and acronyms

BSC	Business Science Corporation
CEO	Chief executive officer
CfBE	Centre for Business Ethics
CHBAH	Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital
CoJ	City of Johannesburg
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GIBS	Gordon Institute of Business Science
WFTF	Water for the Future
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Abstract



Businesses and business schools are at a critical juncture: the need to redefine the value and purpose of management education and that of work has never been more urgent. Businesses can no longer solely focus on creating economic profits. They must also incorporate societal and ecological values so that the future is inclusive and thus sustainable for all. This aligns well with Society 5.0, which entails utilising all technologies and infrastructure to create a sustainable society that contributes to the safety and comfort of individuals. Business schools must equally reassess their function in educating students and partnering with businesses, shifting their focus from producing individuals who are “the best *in* the world to those who are the best *for* the world” (Dyllick et al., 2022, p. 32). This paradigm shift from least harm to most good is needed to deliver regenerative outcomes that can advance businesses that relate to community and society in the future. We posit that this shift is not merely a nice-to-have, but an existential necessity for the planet and its inhabitants.

The *Positive impact rating for business schools: 2022 edition* report (Dyllick et al., 2022) reveals that business schools in the Global South, particularly in Africa, are ahead of their

counterparts in the Global North in social consciousness and conscientious practices. This is a pivotal insight, especially given Africa’s fast-growing, youthful population. As this cohort comes of age, they will not only shape the future of Africa, but also wield considerable global influence. How they interpret and act upon their economic and humanitarian responsibilities will have far-reaching implications. How will young Africans shape Africa and the world as their viewpoints mature and their influence grows, especially as it pertains to the protection of people’s dignity and the environment? More importantly, how should they?

Consequently, African businesses, African-based businesses, and African business schools have a unique opportunity and a moral obligation to guide this burgeoning leadership. They must foster mindsets that shift from extraction to regeneration, thereby creating *spaces for dignity* that unlock a connected society’s abundance and infinite possibilities. In this context, this white paper proposes an approach for such transformation using promising South African case examples of academic-private-public-civic partnerships and collaboration.

Foreword by Rabbi Gideon Pogrund



The Centre for Business Ethics is delighted to publish *Spaces for dignity: How African businesses and business schools can cultivate regenerative practices that unlock abundance*. Drawing on rich African experiences and insights, Dr Roze Phillips invites us to reimagine the role of businesses and business schools. In doing so, she makes an important practical contribution to a growing conversation about what Harvard Business School professor Rebecca Henderson (2021) called “reimagining capitalism” in a “world on fire” (p. ix). In the face of major challenges, such as environmental degradation, economic inequality, and institutional collapse, there is a vital need to develop more inclusive and sustainable business practices.

Dr Phillips’s white paper addresses this need, setting out an approach grounded in human dignity. All people have dignity, which Harvard University professor Michael Rosen (2012) described as “an inner transcendental kernel of inalienable value” (pp. 9, 70). This stands in direct opposition to Hamlet’s view of humanity: “this quintessence of dust” (Shakespeare, 1599/2012, 2.2.293–298). It is because of dignity that all people are entitled to respect; without dignity, there can be no morality.

Dignity provides the “moral foundation” for business activity. As such, “fellow humans are not to be treated as mere objects or instruments in a business organisation’s production function”, but rather with respect (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015, p. 192). Sharing real-life case studies and practical insights, Dr Phillips explains how businesses and business schools can develop *spaces for dignity*.

At the heart of this paper is a fundamental belief: business relationships should be viewed not just in terms of personal interests, but also moral commitments based on a pursuit of the common good. As individuals, we are often imprisoned by the fantasy of independence and self-sufficiency; it takes an imaginative leap to move beyond this. Informed by the values of ubuntu, Dr Phillips encourages us to take this imaginative leap, which enables us to humanise how wealth is accumulated and power is exercised. In this way, her work offers hope – the belief not that things will get better, but that we can make them better (Sacks, 2007).

Foreword by Dr Jerry Gule

**No power on this earth
can destroy the thirst
for human dignity.**

—Nelson R. Mandela



There is a time for everything. Dr Phillips is sounding a clarion call for whose time has come and must be acted upon. The call is for a seismic shift from doing business as usual and business/management education as usual to a new paradigm. This is from a posture of wilful stubbornness to do things as they have always been done to exploring new possibilities. At the centre of this proposed way of doing both business and management education is the promotion and upholding of human dignity. It is a call to move from unbridled greed and an insatiable appetite for accumulating wealth to a model where stewardship for people, society, and the environment becomes a strategic priority both when business is done as well as how and what business schools teach.

In this white paper, Dr Phillips clearly and carefully argues and illustrates the undeniable benefits of what ought to be a symbiotic relationship between business and the community. Whilst this should be obvious, the reality is that there has not been a preponderance of anchoring business practices on stewardship, but rather on exploitative models. Management education has not predominantly emphasised and prioritised stewardship of people and the environment until recently, when the dangers of an exploitative and scarcity mindset have come to the fore through such fora as the World Economic Forum, United Nations Climate Change Conferences (popularly dubbed

the Conference of Parties), and others. The exploitation of resources and people is just not sustainable and Dr Phillips has demonstrated and shown us in this paper that there is a better and more sustainable way of doing business.

Because education liberates, redirects, and legitimises the role that business schools play, especially for those based in Africa, it is imperative that what they teach epitomises values that accentuate ubuntu (I am because we are). From the decolonise education movement to the total rethink of how business should be run post-COVID-19, business schools ought to shift not only their content and methods of teaching, but imbue their curricula with business ethics that accentuate all of humanity and uphold the dignity of all. This is a call that is made clearly and in a manner that is both dignified and empathetic in this white paper, knowing that change is never a walk in the park and takes time. However, until we set our minds to act differently, we are in danger of remaining shackled to past ways of thinking and being. To use a quote that has been attributed to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela since 2001: “It always seems impossible until it’s done.” Taking a step to change could be daunting, but it is vital for long-term sustainability and well-being of people, society, businesses, and the planet.

Preamble



How can African businesses and business schools create fairer and more sustainable societies and economies through regenerative practices? This question is laden with our collective existential dilemmas. It reflects the changing landscape of organisational strategies influenced by macro and micro factors.

Today's consumers and workers, raised in a pro-sustainability environment, are acutely aware of societal problems (Mourtzis et al., 2022). Younger generations value environmental and social justice, ecological sustainability, and healthy living, driving a faster transition to sustainability (Dyllick et al., 2022). This is evident in their purchasing choices, the businesses they support, the causes they advocate for, and their overall lifestyles.

Metz et al. (2022) emphasised the need for systematic changes for sustainability, integrating various theories to link these changes to social and environmental impacts. In developing this white paper, we engaged with concepts such as Society 5.0 (Narvaez Rojas et al., 2021), the circular economy (Kirchherr et al., 2017), systems thinking (Hossain et al., 2020), green talent (Sern et al., 2018), responsible leadership (Liu et al., 2023), shifting from egosystemic to ecosystemic thinking (Lengieza et al., 2022), and futures thinking (Elkington, 2020; Henderson, 2021; Sanford, 2020) to support the spaces for dignity concept. These strategies intersect in the space between the present and future, bridging academic disciplines and sectors.

Organisations play a critical role in enabling the transition to a sustainable world. Their decisions impact workers, the environment, society, and global supply networks. Collectively, they can inspire further change, while individually, they can challenge accepted practices (Sancak, 2023). However, they cannot do it alone. This white paper stresses the importance of cooperation between organisations, non-profits, governments, and communities in creating a sustainable society and advocates for significant reforms beyond current methods.

Why, then, do we still believe in the organisation as the unit of analysis for this white paper? Aside from what has been shared above, nature gives a clue based on scientists' fascination with how fish evolved to walk on land (Metz et al., 2022). Biological research suggests that the neural circuitry necessary for fish to walk on land existed long before legs evolved to carry the fish on dry land (Falkingham, 2018). In this paper, we posit the opposite: though organisational structures have emerged to address grand challenges, the necessary circuitry to support them in achieving grand solutions has not yet evolved. That is what this white paper is: a consideration of how the necessary circuitry in organisations might evolve.

We invite you to consider the ways in which an organisation (with its relevant stakeholders) might become a lynchpin for regeneration and transformation to produce more spaces for dignity in a world needing less harm and more good.

By Dr Roze Phillips and Jeri-Lee Mowers

1.

The disruptive context



When the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten, and the last stream poisoned, you will realise that you cannot eat money.

—Alanis Obomsawin, *Native American Saying* (Poole, 1972, p. 43)

We stand at a critical juncture where environmental degradation, social inequity and inequality, and economic volatility are not just looming threats, but stark realities. The need to shift from shareholder capitalism to more inclusive stakeholder capitalism is not just urgent, it is imperative for our survival and shared prosperity. This approach calls for a Society 5.0 approach. Society 5.0 is a system of systems utilising all technologies and infrastructure to create a sustainable society that contributes to the safety and comfort of individuals (Narvaez Rojas et al., 2021). It is a view that puts human beings and their needs at the centre of all societal development and frees society from the limitations that currently exist (Alhefeiti, 2018; Mourtzis et al., 2022).

This transition is pivotal in addressing the intertwined social and climate injustice crises that threaten our collective futures. It is time for businesses to embrace an ecosystemic approach that goes beyond economic profits to prioritise relationships, community well-being, and environmental health. This is the essence of regenerative business, where the focus is not just on reducing or avoiding harm, but actively contributing to unlocking abundance in our world.

The growing emphasis on environmental, social, and governance practices is a positive step, but more can be done. True stakeholder capitalism involves more than just impact investing, enterprise development or circular economics. Circular economy models replace the “end-of-life” concept with a circular approach prioritising reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering, with the aim of accomplishing sustainable development to the benefit of current and future generations (Kirchherr et al., 2017). Therefore, these models require a philosophical reimagination – not just about how our economies work, but how we think about our economies and our roles in them. It requires regenerative and net positive practices. Inspired by the ubuntu philosophy of “I am because we are”, which highlights a systems thinking approach to large-scale complex systemic problems like dignity, empathy, compassion, interconnectedness, and shared humanity (Hossain et al., 2020), we see a future where businesses co-create a profound, positive impact for and with all stakeholders (Mutsonziwa, 2020). The application, implementation, and approaches in systems thinking are still emerging, and this paper seeks to add specificity to transition points along the journey towards Society 5.0 (Hossain et al., 2020).

Consequently, the need for the John Elkington (2020) “green swan” solutions is urgent. These innovative and transformative changes yield extensive social, economic, and ecological benefits. The Carol Sanford (2020) concept of an “essence-sourced” approach aligns perfectly with this need, urging businesses to harness the unique potential and abundance within individuals and communities for significant, regenerative change. This concept also aligns well with the development of green talent/skills in organisations, namely those technical skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes needed to support sustainable outcomes across economic, social, and environmental outcomes (Sern et al., 2018).

The case studies in this white paper, revealing success stories of academic-public-private-civic collaborations, are more than just

examples of “essence-sourced green swans”; they are a source of inspiration and a call to action. They illustrate how stakeholder capitalism and circular economy principles, implemented through ubuntu coupled with regenerative business practices, can lead to net positive impacts. These narratives demonstrate the transformative power of shifting from egosystemic (self-centric human-nature relationships) to ecosystemic thinking (other-centric human-nature relationships), serving as guides for sustainable and just business practices (Lengieza et al., 2022). However, these cases are not intended as definitive answers. Instead, they serve as provocations, challenging us to also experiment with different ways of knowing, doing and being.

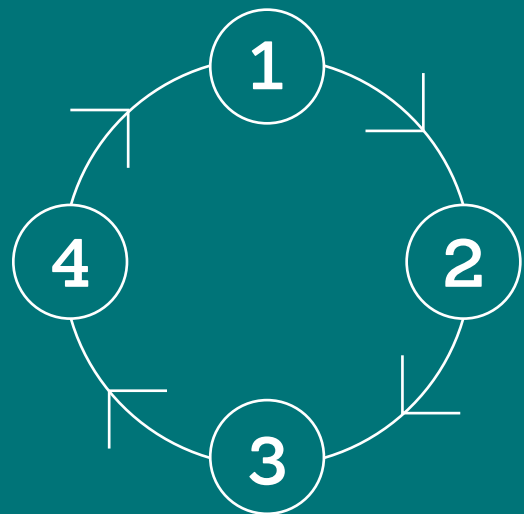
As we navigate these critical times, the conversation around transforming business practices is urgent, yet it should

invigorate, too. Embracing regenerative, net-positive approaches is not only the right thing to do, but also an opportunity to co-create a world where individuals, businesses, communities, and the environment can thrive together.

In an era where the questions of sustainability, equity, justice, and community and climate resilience are becoming increasingly urgent, this white paper offers a timely intervention not just for South Africa and Africa, but the world over. This white paper goes beyond mere discourse to include actionable insights derived from real-life African case studies, thereby equipping you, the reader, with a tangible road map for driving your own meaningful change. See Appendix A for an overview of the methodology employed.

2.

Four stages towards regenerative futures: An approach



The four-stage framework of socio-economic evolution, adapted from the regenerative work of Sandford (2020), outlines a series of paradigm shifts crucial for businesses that aim to achieve sustainable and community-focused growth (see Table 2.1). These shifts include a marked shift beyond traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) approaches. They provide a critical response to the pressing issues of social and climate dignity and

justice, helping businesses move away from profit-centric models towards a proactive role in promoting societal and environmental sustainability and regeneration (refer to Figure 2.1). This is particularly important in regions like Africa, which have been deeply affected by a colonial past and extractive business practices. In this context, this framework can bring about transformative change.

Stage	Indicative mindset and business challenge
<p>Stage 1: Maximise profit</p> <p>Indicative case study addressing this business challenge: Case study 1: <i>Empathy by design</i> (Wits/Baragwanath)</p>	<p>Mindset: Businesses that adopt a shareholder capitalism mindset, where the focus is solely on generating profits, accumulating wealth, and delivering maximum financial value to shareholders, tend to overlook the broader and longer-term social and environmental impacts of their actions, treating them as negative externalities. While this approach drives short-term economic growth, it can have negative consequences on society and the environment.</p> <p>Business challenge: Transitioning from profit-centric to purpose-centric models</p> <p>Businesses should shift their focus from short-term financial gains to considering the long-term impacts of their activities on all stakeholders, including the environment and society at large.</p>
<p>Stage 2: Do less harm</p> <p>Indicative case study addressing this business challenge: Case study 2: <i>The importance of place</i> (Nando's)</p>	<p>Mindset: These companies recognise their place within larger systems and take sustainable and responsible actions. They balance their economic success with social and environmental well-being. They are also expected to address the imbalances that unchecked capitalist pursuits have caused. This frequently requires the development of new regulatory frameworks and policies, and compliance with ethical business practices.</p> <p>Business challenge: Transitioning from reducing the negative to increasing the positive</p> <p>This involves recognising and addressing the negative impacts of business operations and striving to make a positive impact by transitioning from reactive compliance to proactive engagement in social and environmental issues.</p>
<p>Stage 3: Do more good</p> <p>Indicative case study addressing the business challenge: Case study 3: <i>Regeneration instead of gentrification</i> (Victoria Yards)</p>	<p>Mindset: At this stage of their evolution, businesses are no longer just focused on addressing negative impacts, but also actively pursuing positive contributions to society and the environment. This shift is characterised by innovation and leadership in developing products, services, and business models that create tangible benefits. However, a significant challenge arises when businesses, in their efforts to “do good”, impose their own notions of what is beneficial, potentially neglecting the real needs and perspectives of the communities they intend to help. This approach can lead to solutions that do not fully align with what communities actually need or value, reducing the potential business and societal value that could have been unlocked.</p> <p>Business challenge: Learning to collaborate and co-create with broad community ecosystems</p> <p>Businesses are encouraged to collaborate closely with communities, gaining a deep understanding of their real needs and working together to create mutually beneficial and respectful solutions. This stage helps businesses move beyond a one-sided view of doing good and become true partners who engage in meaningful dialogue with their stakeholders.</p>
<p>Stage 4: Enable most good</p> <p>Indicative case study addressing this business challenge: Case study 4: <i>A river runs through</i> (restoration of the Jukskei River)</p>	<p>Mindset: Businesses complete the evolution from an ownership mindset to a stewardship mindset. They recognise the value of communities and focus on co-creating profitable and regenerative models, while respecting local cultures and environments. They collaborate with communities to understand their unique needs and focus on empathetic stakeholder engagement. By respecting the diversity and complexity of communities and their ecosystems, businesses are contributing to the social and environmental systems, while enhancing the dignity of individuals, communities, and the environment.</p> <p>Business challenge: Unlocking broad direct and indirect stakeholder abundance and infinite ecosystem possibilities</p> <p>This final stage is the adoption of regenerative business models, where companies contribute to the well-being of the environment and society economically, socially, and ecologically. Businesses are urged to harness the unique potential and abundance within individuals and communities for significant, regenerative change that unlocks true ecosystem abundance and infinite possibilities.</p>

Table 2.1: The four stages of regenerative futures

See Figure 2.1 for the visual representation of the four stages of regenerative futures. By adopting an ecosystemic approach and actively aligning with the needs of impacted individuals, communities, and the environment, businesses can go beyond simply achieving net zero responses and instead aim for net positive ones. They can become key drivers in the regeneration of society and the environment, restoring dignity and earning their license to lead and trade.

It is important to note that this white paper focuses on issues outside the workplace. We acknowledge that dignity inside the workplace is another important part of the *spaces for dignity sentiment*. Although crucial for employees' emotional and psychological well-being (Sarkar, 2024), dignity inside the workplace is beyond the ambit of the current paper.

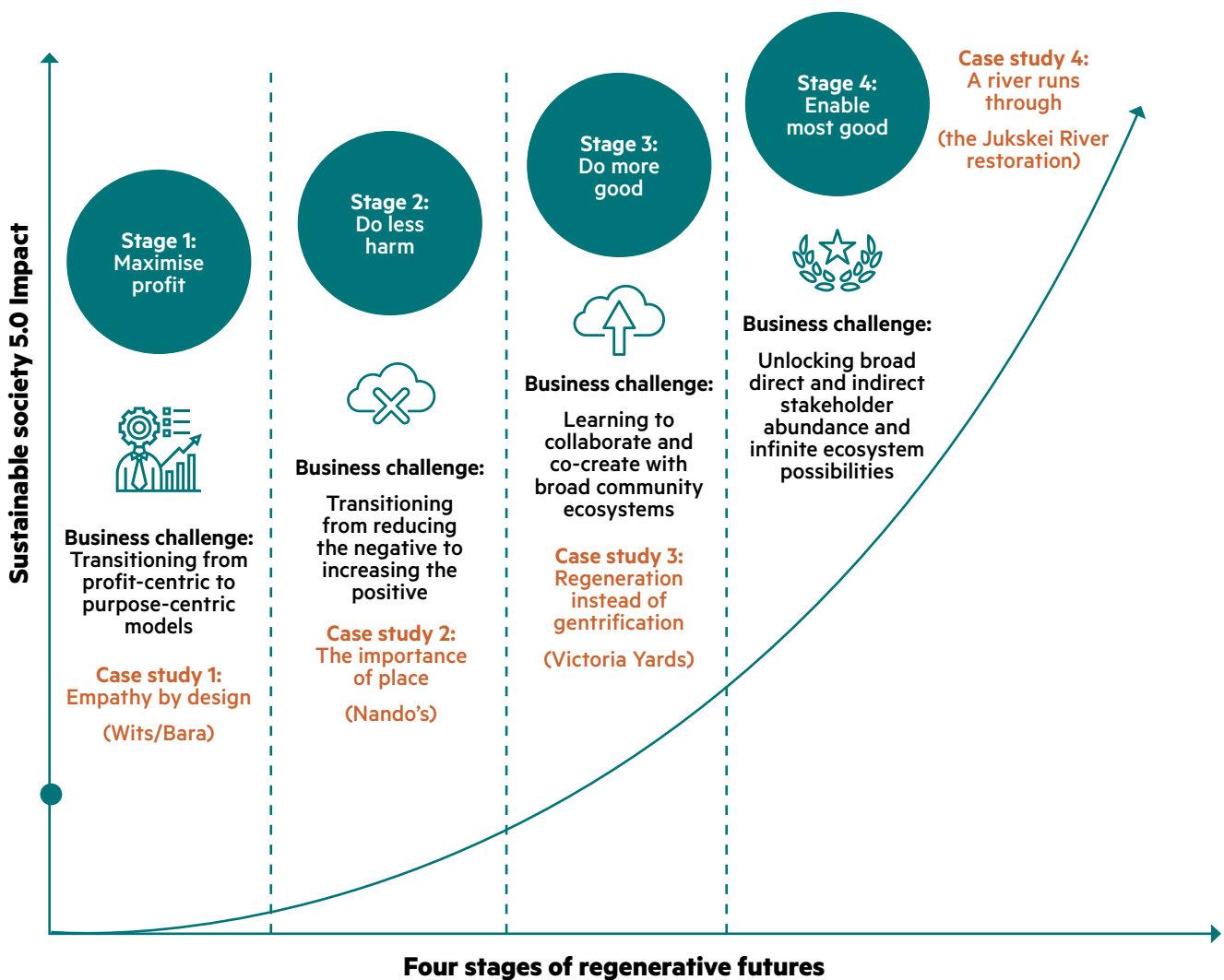


Figure 2.1: At a glance – the four stages of regenerative futures
Source: Author's own

3.

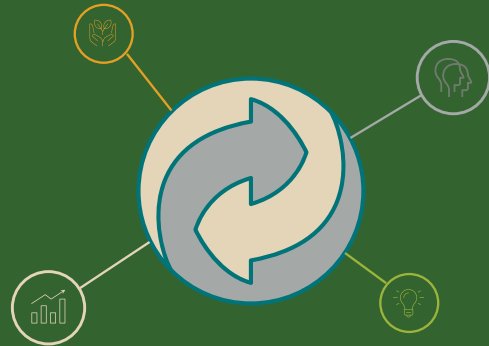
The role of business schools in helping shift business leaders towards regeneration



Business schools have a pivotal role to play, given their role in shaping leadership discourse. They must rethink the dominant role of capitalism and profit maximisation in shaping socio-economic structures (as alluded to earlier, this is beyond traditional CSR). These paradigms, as described in stage one of our four-stage framework, should be considered as only one among various paradigms for societal organisation. To create diverse and sustainable futures, it is crucial to move beyond a narrow, growth-centric perspective and promote innovative forms of cooperation.

This white paper urges business schools to liberate themselves from capitalist ideology's pervasive – yet often unacknowledged – influence in their teaching programmes. Education on regenerative futures, as described in stages three and four of our four-stage framework, should not be limited to optional subjects, but should rather become a central part of the curriculum. African business schools have the potential to lead this transformative shift, based on successful case studies on their doorsteps, four of which are outlined next.

4.

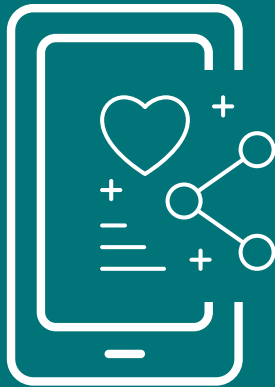


Case studies: Spaces for dignity

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead

Storytelling stands as a pivotal skill in shaping the future of work (Lund et al., 2021). What follows here are four distinct yet interwoven stories of entities that are transitioning from business as usual and intentionally grappling with the challenge of evolving their business models. These case studies aim to capture the collaboration between individuals, organisations, and communities needed for regenerative futures to become a reality. They highlight the value of community, interconnectedness, and dignity in everyday actions that contribute to societal well-being and challenge the prevailing notions of what meaningful impact looks like, emphasising that extraordinary heroes and ordinary “non-heroes” shape our world in significant ways. These stories showcase environments where dignity flourishes and impact is amplified, demonstrating the power of collective action to achieve remarkable feats and set a precedent for others to follow.



4.1

Case study 1: Empathy by design

This case study showcases the development of a mobile app that simplifies clinician workflow, highlighting the significance of understanding users' needs with empathy and respect. It exemplifies the creation of digital *spaces for dignity* in both system and application designs, which value the workflows and work environments of the user community, which in this instance are the clinicians at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital (CHBAH) in partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

4.1.1 Addressing public healthcare challenges in the Global South

Known for its excellence in academics and research, Wits launched the Better Health for All initiative in partnership with CHBAH. This initiative aligns with Wits' commitment to social justice and the common good, which is particularly important for transforming healthcare at public healthcare institutions like CHBAH, a South African landmark that reflects the country's dedication to upholding the dignity and worth of all human life.

4.1.2 Genesis of change: When two icons meet

CHBAH is the largest hospital in Africa and the third-largest in the world, with over 6 760 staff members and around 3 200 public-sector beds. Every year, it handles approximately 150 000 inpatient cases and 500 000 outpatient cases. However, the use of paper-based records has led to healthcare providers spending a lot of time capturing and finding patient information, which hinders patient care. Until recently, there was no digitised data collection process or an integrated electronic patient record system, which made healthcare delivery a critical challenge that needed addressing.

To overcome the challenges faced in healthcare delivery and plan for the future, CHBAH formed an academic-private-public-civic partnership with Wits called 1HEART.1BEAT.4BARA. The partnership focused on digitising patient records, which is a significant step towards improving healthcare delivery. What sets this collaboration apart is its guiding principle of prioritising community healthcare and service delivery over profit. The partnership aims to give healthcare workers, such as doctors and nurses, back the time they spend on unnecessary manual record-keeping, enabling them to provide better patient care, to conduct better quality research, and to save more lives.

4.1.3 Overcoming challenges in resource-limited settings

Digitisation in healthcare could reduce healthcare spending by up to 15% by 2030, potentially saving South Africa US\$11 billion (Jousset et al., 2023). Electronic medical records and advanced health tools are among the innovations that drive this significant financial impact. In addition, there has been a growing need, especially in the Global South, for comprehensive and accurate data to conduct effective clinical research. Efficient data collection systems can significantly enhance research outcomes (Cure et al., 2023).

However, the path to realising these savings is challenging. Existing electronic medical record systems are not meeting their potential, and poor user adoption and usability are hindering the envisioned digital healthcare ecosystem. In settings with limited resources, such as CHBAH, the cost and complexity of proprietary systems pose significant barriers. This is because these do not align well with the specific requirements of the public healthcare ward setting, presenting integration difficulties and cumbersome usage.

Time-starved clinicians often encounter more confusing than helpful tools, plagued by non-intuitive interfaces and a lack of adequate training. Further complicating the situation are these systems' administrative overheads and subpar performance. The anticipated ease of data exchange often gives way to fragmented information silos stemming from system incompatibilities and a lack of universal standards.

Interoperability and standardisation issues entangle clinicians in a web of intricate documentation and system inefficiencies, diverting their attention from patient care. This journey towards digitisation is costly, with high expenses and vendor lock-in situations that bind healthcare providers to costly and rigid systems, impeding progress towards an integrated healthcare solution.

This project adopted an open-source approach coupled with a focus on user-centric design to overcome these hurdles. This strategic pivot allowed circumvention of the financial and practical constraints typically associated with commercial systems. The result was the creation of an application that was more cost-effective and more tailored to the hospital's specific needs (see Appendix B for an overview of the project's outcomes). Coded and encoded with dignity and empathy, this approach marks a significant step forward in the journey towards an efficient, integrated healthcare system. It demonstrates the power of thoughtful, user-focused technological innovation in healthcare, especially in resource-limited settings.

4.1.4 Honouring clinician workflows

Paediatric surgeons at CHBAH, led by Prof. Jerome Loveland, took a bold step towards collaborating in the development of an app. This approach puts users at the centre of the process and diverges them from conventional, expensive healthcare systems. As a result, they were able to innovate and create a solution that catered to the unique needs of public healthcare in Africa. These paediatric surgeons played a vital role in co-creating the app and ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in daily operations.

The development team from implementation partners, Business Science Corporation (BSC), designed context-specific data systems tailored to the unique workflows and needs of the department. The team ensured that the users were on board by involving healthcare professionals in the development process, leading to optimal implementation and continued usage. This approach involved meetings with senior management and junior healthcare professionals within the department, and extensive time spent with healthcare professionals to understand their day-to-day functions. This resulted in a mutual trust relationship between CHBAC healthcare professionals and BSC developers, which was imperative to the success of the project.

4.1.5 An overnight success

In March 2023, just five months after development began, the proof of concept for a mobile-enabled patient record app called "1beat" was launched. The app was designed using the Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources® standard and created with input from doctors. The launch was a significant departure from the traditional paper-based records system as well as from that of proprietary large-scale technology implementation launches. In a single night, the app replaced paper records with digital solutions, and clinicians already familiar with the app's design made a smooth transition. The following morning, doctors could consult 1beat real-time online patient records captured on their phones, while handing over patients to colleagues and nursing personnel during ward rounds.

4.1.6 The data says it all

Efficiency gains:

Within five months of its launch, the 1beat app was adopted by 30 paediatric surgeons, who handled over 3 000 admissions and 10 000 data entries. This resulted in a significant reduction in the time spent on record-keeping. Three months later, the app became available in two additional paediatric surgery units, namely Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital and Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital. This achievement is a testament to the app's ease of use and alignment with clinicians' workflow. The system followed the process, instead of the other way around.

Frontline stories:

The 1beat mobile app received rave reviews from clinicians, marking a transformative impact on healthcare efficiency. Ninety per cent of users reported significant time savings, allowing clinicians to focus more on direct patient care, instead of administrative tasks. The same percentage highlighted a surge in team collaboration, underlining the app's role in enhancing communication among healthcare professionals. Moreover, 84% of clinicians believe that 1beat will be instrumental in propelling medical research forward. Surgeons shared how the app transformed their daily routines, allowing more time with patients and less time on paperwork. One clinician notably referred to the app as "the Google for patients", underscoring its ease of use and the vast, accessible information it provides. This accolade highlights the app's ability to simplify and expedite the retrieval of patient information, a critical factor in emergency care and routine hospital operations.

Operational impact:

The app replaced four disparate systems with a single, streamlined solution, enhancing care coordination and workflow.

User reception and adoption:

The 1beat app quickly demonstrated its value in CHBAH's busy wards. Clinicians could register patients, order laboratory results, and manage care plans directly from their phones, turning what used to be a tedious process into a seamless experience.

A model for global healthcare:

The success of this digital transformation at CHBAH has garnered international attention. The empathy-driven design approach is now viewed as a potential blueprint for public healthcare systems facing similar challenges worldwide.

4.1.7 Creating digital spaces for dignity

Less is not loss. Open-source, mobile-friendly, and AI-enabled technologies can replace expensive, unwieldy proprietary systems with little to no service degradation and maximum user adoption. The digital transformation of CHBAH is one such powerful example of how empathy, collaboration, and innovation can revolutionise healthcare. It shows how designing with a deep understanding of user needs, in this case, the clinicians at CHBAH, can have a profound impact. This case study is an inspiring example for businesses and institutions worldwide, demonstrating that successful implementation of technology, especially in demanding environments, should be based on a profound, empathetic understanding of the users it aims to serve.

This narrative goes beyond technological advancement, demonstrating the possibilities available when you think differently to deliver quality care and dignity of service in healthcare. Additionally, these outcomes belie what we have become accustomed to in popular literature about managing change easily and seamlessly (Carroll et al., 2023).

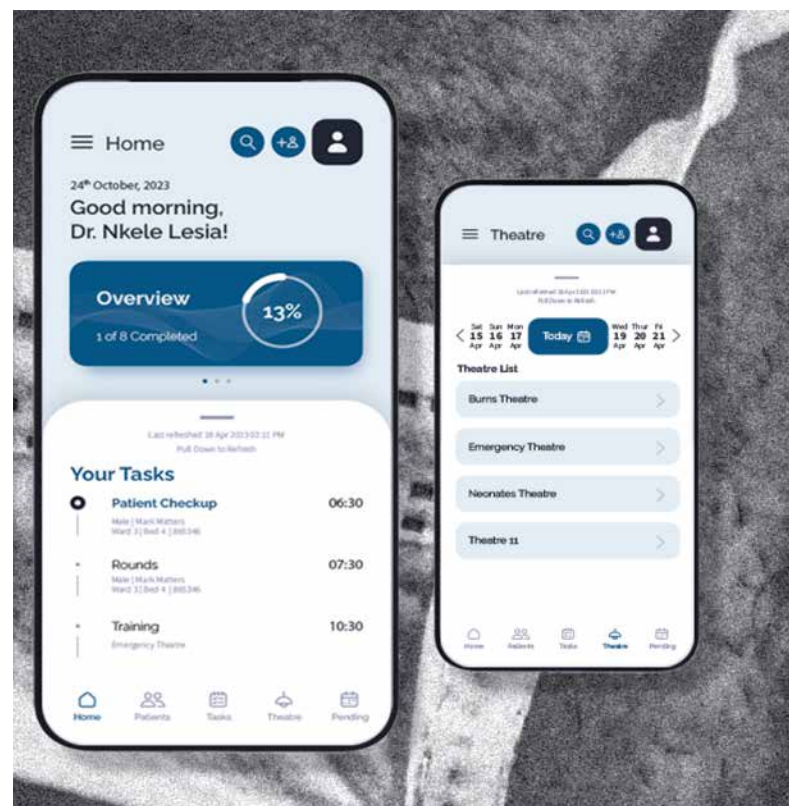


Figure 4.1: the 1beat app



4.2

Case study 2: The importance of place

This is our moment. But what a moment. We must get into the streets and start doing stuff as “We, the People” [quoting the opening line of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996] because it is a powerful message to the nation. We must understand that the road we are going to walk on is a long road. Listen to the music under the noise. South Africa and Africa are full of music. It is the crazies that will wake the nation. I have so much hope. I am playing in the sandpit of purpose. I am starting to dream in colour now.

—Robert Brozin, co-founder of Nando’s

Nando’s is a famous peri-peri chicken fast-casual restaurant brand in South Africa that has always been committed to its Southern African roots. The company’s story showcases how a business can profoundly understand the significance of “place” and embody it. Nando’s restaurants are referred to as “casas”, which means “homes” in Portuguese. This case study demonstrates how Nando’s ethos of “home” has expressed its purpose statement of “Changing lives, together” and transformed the communities it serves.

4.2.1 Staying true to origins: Investing in local communities

“We chose to stay,” asserts Robert (Robbie) Brozin, co-founder of Nando’s. He is referring to the company’s decision to keep its headquarters in Lorentzville, an impoverished neighbourhood in inner-city Johannesburg that has held significance to its beginnings. Thirty-five years ago, it was here that Nando’s first marinated its chicken. Hence, the name Nando’s Central Kitchen is used, instead of Nando’s Head Office.

This decision to remain in the neighbourhood went against the trend of moving to wealthier areas like Sandton. However, it represented a deep commitment to the community that supported Nando’s in its early stages. The company has invested over ZAR80 million in this facility and its surrounds, intending to rejuvenate the inner-city suburb and empower the local people. Since then, Nando’s initiative has attracted other businesses and investments to Lorentzville, helping it transform into a vibrant, creative economic hub of potential and possibilities.

Nando’s is actively involved in various local projects, ranging from environmental to educational initiatives. It has appointed a community manager (Romy Stander, supported by Leigh van der Watt) to spearhead local empowerment programmes. Robbie says, “We do not believe in community hand-outs. We offer hand-ups.”

Nando’s transformative purpose of “Changing lives, together” and Robbie’s philosophy that respecting and serving their roots lead to manifold reciprocal support from the community. His words reflect this: “Money will find you when you do things not for branding or for profit but with purpose.”

4.2.2 Empowering youth and communities: The heart of place

Nando's is dedicated to nurturing young entrepreneurs, creatives, and innovators. The brand has always prioritised supporting emerging talent in South Africa. Its commitment to the arts is not enterprise development. It is an integral part of its business strategy to make social responsibility a part of business as usual. The brand's Central Kitchen, which doubles as an art gallery, showcases the best art and design talent from South Africa and demonstrates the interfaces between the company's core business and its social responsibility (Nando's, 2024). There is an alignment in values and social responsibility is part of business as usual (Nando's, n.d.).

In 2001, Nando's partnered with the Spier Arts Trust to launch the Nando's Art Initiative, which marked the beginning of a profound journey into the world of contemporary Southern African art. The initiative is not only about collecting art, but also about fostering artistic growth and providing professional development opportunities. Today, Nando's has become the largest private collector of contemporary Southern African art, a testament to its commitment to the region's cultural heritage. In 2014, Nando's expanded its involvement in the creative economy by supporting furniture and furnishing design and music initiatives. The brand has supported over 79 designers and makers sourced through its Nando's Hot Young Designer talent search programme (Innovate, 2024). These works infuse Nando's restaurants with the essence of Southern African design and transform them from dining spaces into cultural hubs.

According to Robbie, "All 1 200 restaurants across the world are Southern African influencers" – Nando's benefits as an investor in assets that increase in value. In addition, by supporting artists in producing high-quality works, which raises the international profile of those artists to their financial benefit, the company is "Changing lives, together".



4.2.3 Goodbye Malaria: From one to millions

Nando's has always aimed to redefine the role of business in society. One of its most significant contributions to stewardship is tackling a critical public health issue – malaria. The company's journey with the Goodbye Malaria initiative began humbly by spraying a single village dwelling in Mozambique, where many of its chilli farms are located. The initiative has since grown exponentially and is now assisting over 3.5 million people in their fight against malaria (Innovate, 2024).

Nando's contribution to this effort goes beyond mere funding. The company also focuses on education and empowerment, teaching communities how to combat the spread of malaria effectively. Nando's involvement in Goodbye Malaria is not just a marketing strategy or branding exercise, but a commitment to making a real difference in the lives of millions.

By taking on such a significant public health challenge, Nando's demonstrates how businesses can contribute to solving global issues, transcending their traditional commercial roles. It is not just about profitability or market share. It is about purpose, generosity, and making a tangible difference in the world.

4.2.4 Stewardship through business

Nando's is a company that combines purpose with profitability. It believes in the principle of human dignity and focuses on local communities. Its business approach goes beyond just financial goals. It emphasises sustainable solutions that respect and enhance the intrinsic value of the communities it serves. Nando's understands the importance of place and integrate this concept into every aspect of business, both internally and externally. It is committed to community and environmental stewardship, which reshapes business narratives and profoundly impacts the wider world as it has set its sights on creating a lasting positive social impact in all it does.

While Nando's has a global presence, it maintains a deep connection with local roots. Its active dedication to community and environmental stewardship brings about tangible transformation. The company plants seeds of change and hope in every community it touches, both locally and globally. Driven by the ubuntu principle of interdependence, Nando's overarching vision for societal transformation transcends geographic boundaries. This philosophy guides its global and local actions.

The company's dual focus on practical community engagement and a value-driven global vision represents the core of earth stewardship. It embodies the true essence of "Changing lives, together". It serves as an inspiring blueprint for businesses striving to transition from a traditional shareholder-centric approach with a "less harm" mindset to a more inclusive stakeholder-focused strategy with a "more good" mindset.



4.3

Case study 3: Regeneration instead of gentrification

Innovation is not always about creating something completely new. Sometimes, working with what you already have at your disposal can lead to the most imaginative, unique, and sustainable solutions. This case study showcases the revitalisation of a neglected and dilapidated industrial laundry and how it has been transformed into a thriving hub for urban farming, artisans, makers, and creatives. This case demonstrates the importance of developing green talent/skills in organisations and is a shining example of how regenerative architectural design practices and a light Earth footprint can breathe new life into urban precincts.

4.3.1 Historical context: A landscape of decay

Victoria Yards, located across the road from Nando's Central Kitchen, used to be an industrial laundry in the early 20th century. However, over time, it became derelict, falling prey to urban decay, homelessness, and illegal activities, making the neighbourhood of Lorentzville unsafe and insecure (see Figure 4.1).

The previous landowner had plans to demolish the site and build low-cost housing or student accommodation. When social impact investor Jonathan (Jonti) Brozin learnt about this, he felt that demolishing the site would significantly lose legacy and economic potential. Therefore, he teamed up with real estate developer Brian Green, who is known for “creating evolving animated spaces that get more beautiful with age without needing facelifts” (Singh, 2019), to preserve the site's heritage and transform it into an economic and cultural hub that brings development into Lorentzville. Brian immediately saw the potential for urban agriculture, artisan studios, and local design ateliers, which set the stage for a transformative journey.

4.3.2 Transforming Victoria Yards: Dignity and sustainability

The journey began in 2017, when the transition from the old to the new was handled with dignity. The existing tenants were gradually phased out with humane considerations, allowing them time to relocate respectfully without any coercion. This approach made it possible for the existing and new tenants to build amicable relations, setting the stage for the culture that this space aimed to embody – one of collaboration, mutual respect, dignity, and compassion.

The same dignity and compassion were also extended to the environment. The adoption of regenerative practices began early, with the planting of indigenous trees and the implementation of a framework for sustainable development and wise water usage. These initial steps signified a commitment to environmental stewardship and the surrounding community's well-being. In the early days, when water was scarce, Victoria Yards' boreholes supplied water to much of the community, which marked the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between business and community.

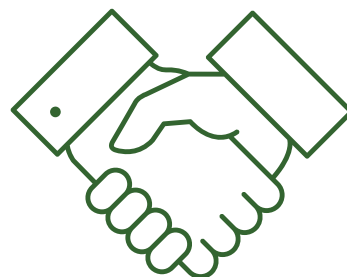




Figure 4.2: All plants are edible and buildings have been refurbished with the lightest touch possible (concrete and bagwashed)
 Source: Liz at Lancaster, 2018



Figure 4.3: Victoria Yards, a landscape in decay
 Source: JoburgTodayTV, 2018

4.3.3 The grand old lady emerges again

Today, Victoria Yards is a collection of exposed brick structures surrounded by lush greenery (see Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4). This urban complex combines social development with commercial success, transforming the Johannesburg inner-city landscape and the look and feel of Lorentzville (refer to Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.4: Victoria Yards' orchard – herbs and medicinal plants
 Source: Liz at Lancaster, 2018



Figure 4.5: Victoria Yards emerges as one of Joburg's trendiest artisanal working spaces
Source: Singh, 2019

The space embodies several key elements:

Urban agriculture:

The urban agriculture project at Victoria Yards creates jobs and generates income, while also beautifying the space and providing edible produce. Every Wednesday, the children in the community join the head gardener to learn about vegetable planting. They regularly sell the fruits of their labour to the public, learning about respecting nature, self-sufficiency, and entrepreneurship. A free community garden at the entrance symbolises the project's inclusivity and strengthens community bonds. "The gardens had to be edible," says Brian (Singh, 2019), emphasising the recognised need to serve the surrounding impoverished areas.

Visual arts:

Several prominent galleries within Victoria Yards support the arts sector. With Nando's as the largest private collector of contemporary Southern African art on its doorstep, a bright future is promised for visual arts in the area.

Artisan studios:

The rustic, industrial units serve dual purposes as work studios during the week and galleries over the weekends. They showcase artisanal manufacturing and offer a massive opportunity for artisans to demonstrate their skills and sell their work to the public. This exposure helps these artisans within the community and beyond to grow from apprentices to teachers to business owners, showcasing their abilities close to home. One of the success stories is that of Tshepo Jeans, which has grown from humble beginnings to an international brand. Tshepo has his studio at Victoria Yards, where he combines a retail presence with a factory. Machinists are sourced and trained from within the community and surrounding areas.



Figure 4.6: In collaboration with Down2earth, Victoria Yards now teaches sustainable gardening practices and sells organic vegetables and herbs to the surrounding community
Source: Down2earth, n.d.

4.3.4 Community integration and impact

Victoria Yards has a strong connection with the local community. It sources raw materials from within the precinct and nearby areas. According to Brian, the precinct tries to source from its tenants and as close to the Lorentzville-Troyeville valley as possible. Brian emphasises that Victoria Yards is committed to fostering a self-sustaining community ecosystem (see Figure 4.6).

4.3.5 A blueprint for urban renewal

Victoria Yards is a prime example of how urban spaces can be revitalised to benefit businesses, communities, and the environment. This former industrial laundry site has been given a new lease on life by respecting its history, engaging with the community, and prioritising socio-ecological and economic sustainability. The precinct serves as a role model of urban renewal, demonstrating that spaces can evolve from places of decay to engines of economic and social empowerment without resorting to gentrification. This case study serves as an inspiring model for businesses and communities worldwide aiming to transition from causing “less harm” to promoting “more good”. It balances human needs, economic sustainability, and earth stewardship.



4.4

Case study 4: A river runs through

Urban areas face intensifying water scarcity due to climate change, causing altered rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, biodiversity loss, and rapid city population and industrial growth. In Johannesburg's inner city, water management is challenging due to water quantity and quality issues. The problem is not just a lack of water, but also weak governance, decaying infrastructure,

and human activity, attitudes, and behaviours towards water in the city. Traditional government-led approaches have proven inadequate. A multidisciplinary team from South Africa, learning from the Cape Town water crisis of 2018, recommended the following actions for creating water-smart cities (Fell & Carden, 2022; Stoll, 2022):

1

Develop water-sensitive, resilient cities that integrate "city as a catchment" management, water quality, ecosystem protection, and climate adaptation.

2

Implement integrated water planning and collaborative governance to improve water security and ensure sustainable and equitable access to water.

3

Replan, design, and architect cities to diversify water supply sources and access real-time water data for informed decision-making.

4

Engage and educate inner-city citizens to be water-savvy and actively participate in water management.

Against this backdrop, the restoration of the Jukskei River is a remarkable example of public-business-academic-civic collaboration, ecological redemption, earth stewardship, and socio-economic development, woven together with cultural renaissance. This case study delves into the transformative journey of the river in the Lorentzville-Troyeville valleys, led by Water for the Future (WFTF) (Johannesburg Inner City Partnership, n.d.) and its partners and supported by anchor businesses like Nando's and Victoria Yards in the area.



Figure 4.7: Informal Settlements on the banks of the Jukskei River
Source: McCartney, 2023

4.4.1 Context and challenges: The forgotten river

The Jukskei River was once a lifeline for Johannesburg, but it has fallen victim to urban decay. Its natural spring in Ellis Park, which is located within a kilometre of the Nando's Central Kitchen and Victoria Yards, was lost to urban development. The river is now marred by pollution and neglect (see Figure 4.7). As it winds through various neighbourhoods from Bertrams to Bruma, Alexandra, Paulshof, Dainfern, Leeuwkop Prison, Midrand, and finally ending in Hartebeespoort Dam, the Jukskei River reflects the socio-economic disparities of the city. The river's deterioration symbolises environmental degradation and the marginalisation of adjacent communities (Iqani, 2021).

The effort to clean up the Jukskei River has become more than an environmental initiative. It is a step towards bridging a deeply entrenched socio-environmental divide. By restoring the river, there is potential to address water security, revitalise a natural landmark and source of sustenance, and democratise access to and appreciation of nature. It is a move towards acknowledging that every citizen, regardless of their socio-economic status, deserves to experience the beauty and benefits of their country's natural endowments.

4.4.2 The genesis of change: Water for the Future

The tide started to turn when Water for the Future, which was co-founded by designer Romy Stander and environmental artist Hannelie Coetzee, was formed. Romy, who had previously worked with Nando's on its Mozambique projects and now focuses her energies as Nando's Lorentzville community manager, found a new purpose after the COVID-19 pandemic hit. She dedicated herself to the revival of the Jukskei, not just "to cleanse the waters, but also to heal the community's relationship with their river".

4.4.3 Critical turning point:

The Victoria Yards development generates new opportunities for the Jukskei

In 2017, the development of Victoria Yards, an urban regeneration project across the road from Nando's Central Kitchen, became a turning point for the restoration of the Jukskei River. The project aimed to create a creative hub for art and agriculture. This catalysed the river's rejuvenation. The river had once played a vital role in business activities, with water from it being used in the industrial laundry that served the city from the site that eventually became Victoria Yards. However, by 2016, only a little stream of the once-mighty

river remained. The arrival of Victoria Yards, with its capital injection and long-term development plans, demanded municipal infrastructure and services, catching the attention of the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) management.

WFTF employed a multi-pronged approach that addressed economic, ecological, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects, aiming to enhance climate resilience and water security. The approach included several initiatives, such as:

Community engagement:

WFTF's key principle was to involve the surrounding communities in all activities. The clean-up activities served as a springboard for further community involvement and ownership of initiatives, highlighting the socio-economic benefits of a revitalised river.

Invasive alien removal:

Since late 2020, efforts have focused on eradicating invasive plant species – for instance, tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), Japanese privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*), black mulberry (*Morus nigra*), White stinkwood (*Celtis africana*), Bug weed (*Solanum mauritianum*) – along the riverbanks (Rood, 2018). These plants damaged the ecosystem and facilitated illegal dumping and activities. Now, these plants are processed for biomass and used for income-generating purposes, such as wood chips, weaving, and firewood.

Rehabilitation of the inner-city stormwater drainage system:

WFTF's research has confirmed that focusing on sustainable urban drainage interventions with community participation can help address and mitigate up to 70% of further downstream flooding issues, which also lead to cholera outbreaks (which occur with dense peri-urban populations living along flood-prone rivers) (CoJ, 2021). However, the stormwater infrastructure has not kept up with the needs of the community or with changing climate. As a result, flooding has become a regular occurrence. The tenants at Victoria Yards, who were tired of having their studios affected by flooding, demanded improvements to the stormwater drainage systems. This time, the CoJ municipality has listened and taken action to address the issue by giving the stormwater drainage system much-needed and long-overdue attention.

Toxic waste removal:

On Heritage Day 2021, a significant milestone occurred when substantial toxic waste was removed from the river's entrance and culverts.

Partnerships to clean the river:

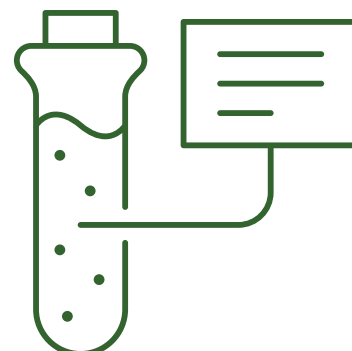
WFTF collaborated with organisations, such as Alexandra Water Warriors, Gardens of Grace, and Rangers in Mission, through the Social Employment Fund and created over 100 job opportunities over two years for people in the area with high unemployment.

Scientific monitoring:

The removal of invasive plants opened the way for scientific assessment of water, soil, humidity and wind quality, which is crucial for real data and insights and for developing comprehensive remediation plans.

Impact on Lorentzville, Troyeville, and other downstream communities:

The river's restoration is crucial for local religious and cultural practices. Efforts are being made to restore its sanctity, allowing it to be a suitable site for spiritual gatherings again.



Economic revitalisation:

The cleaner river has started to improve property values and spur development and increased investment inflows, as seen in Victoria Yards. Urban renewal is not about gentrification, but about nurturing the existing community.

Social identity:

The project is fostering a palpable sense of pride and identity, connecting people with their environment and each other. The river's health is owned by the community.

Educational empowerment:

The initiative is a living laboratory for learning and innovation about environmental stewardship in urban settings. Partnerships with universities (to meet research needs) and businesses (to overcome capacity and resource constraints) have enabled this to facilitate collective action to improve enabling environments.

Entrepreneurship opportunities:

Unemployed community members received new skills training, leading to new small businesses. These include landscaping, tree-felling, making and constructing palisades and fences, and beekeeping, amongst others.

Sonic and cultural resonance:

The river's unique soundscape highlighted its role in the community's daily life, blending natural, industrial, and social sounds. It reminds us that we are a part of nature and not apart from it (refer to Figure 4.8).

Spiritual and cultural renewal:

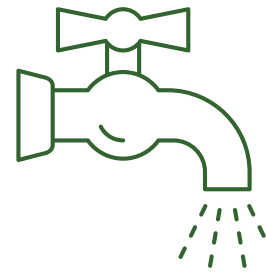
The restoration of the Jukskei River is not just an environmental project; it is also a journey towards creating *spaces for dignity*. Revitalising the river has restored its role as a sacred space, deepening the community's spiritual connection and cultural practices along its banks.



Figure 4.8: The Jukskei River today as it passes through Victoria Yards
Source: Author's own

With the Jukskei River restoration, there is an opportunity to go beyond just renewing spiritual attachment to the river, but also educating the users/community about safe ways of interacting with water, as many lives have been lost when traditional rituals are performed (Bhengu, 2024; Sehoai, 2022). To empower individuals, we would be remiss not to realise this renewal by also empowering individuals with skills for safe use of this resource. The project's impact thus extends beyond ecological restoration to reshaping local neighbourhoods and communities.

4.4.4 Beyond the valley: Contributing towards a water-smart city



Managing urban water cycles effectively requires a holistic approach that considers them as integral components of broader ecological systems. This necessitates innovative and inclusive infrastructure, governance, and community engagement approaches (see Appendix C). The Water Security and Climate Resilience initiative is now part of the CoJ Upper Jukskei catchment management plan, and it contributes towards water resilience in the inner city.

The rejuvenation of the Jukskei River is a testament to the power of collaborative efforts to address environmental challenges and social inequalities (refer to Figure 4.9). By revitalising the river, WFTF and its partners are restoring an ecosystem and reweaving the social and economic fabric of the communities along its banks.



Figure 4.9: WFTF stakeholders and supporters
Source: WFTF, n.d.

This case study exemplifies how environmental stewardship can become a catalyst for regenerative business and the creation of dignified spaces. It shows how businesses, governments, and communities can work together to foster a broader recognition of the importance of nature in all communities.

5.

Towards regeneration: Key lessons from our case studies



In today's world, contrary to the teachings of Milton Friedman (Carson, 1993), the business of business can no longer just be business. Businesses have a broader responsibility towards society, which includes social responsibility, community development, and environmental stewardship. Businesses can become integral pillars of societal regeneration by embracing their connection to society. The success of businesses should be defined by their abilities to harmonise profit with purpose and align their goals with societal good. This approach

allows businesses to secure their place and prosperity in the regenerative economies of the future.

The four case studies – (1) *Empathy by design*; (2) *The power of place*; (3) *Regeneration instead of gentrification*, and (4) *A river runs through* – demonstrate the fundamental principles of stakeholder capitalism and regenerative economies. These studies provide useful insights for businesses to consider, as outlined below.



From egocentricity to ecocentricity:

All four cases emphasise the importance of considering the broader community's needs and values. Whether it is designing technology with a deep understanding of end-users' needs (*Empathy by design*), or businesses investing back into their originating communities (*The power of place*), or urban development that benefits existing residents (*Regeneration instead of gentrification*) or ecological restoration for communal benefit (*A river runs through*), each story underscores the importance of prioritising stakeholder interests and well-being. The cases showcase the mutual benefit this affords all stakeholders, in addition to business imperatives around revenue, cost-efficiency, competitive advantage, and sustainability.



Sustainable and inclusive growth:

These case studies promote sustainable and inclusive growth, while rejecting extractive or exclusive practices. They emphasise approaches that ensure long-term viability and benefit a wide range of stakeholders, including local government, business, academia (including research institutions), communities, environments, healthcare professionals, and patients.



Regeneration over exploitation:

The concept of regeneration is central to these case studies, which aim to restore and renew in a way that adds value. This contrasts with models that exploit or deplete resources, whether they are environmental resources (as in the restoration of the river), human resources (as in acknowledging the workload of clinicians), or community and cultural resources (as in urban development, nature, and business growth). The narratives focus on regeneration that benefits all aspects of society and avoids harmful depletion of resources.



Profit through purpose:

The shared stories demonstrate a comprehensive approach to prioritising purpose and creating value beyond financial gains. This approach considers the impact on the environment, social equity, and cultural integrity as essential elements of genuine value. It aligns well with the principles of stakeholder capitalism, which emphasises the importance of creating value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders.



Responsible and responsive leadership:

Responsive and responsible leadership in business and development is crucial for ethical, equitable, and sustainable outcomes. These narratives illustrate the importance of considering the broader impact of decisions on stakeholders. Robbie and his legacy of responsible leadership illustrates this best in *The power of place*. By going beyond building an individual empire, Robbie focuses on creating a lasting impact that benefits the organisation, its people, and the broader community. By fostering a culture of responsibility and leadership, he laid the foundation for his son, Jonti and Brian to reimagine Victoria Yards, which gave way to WFTF and its efforts to revitalise the Jukskei River. It illustrates the moral responsibility of the economically privileged to evolve (both personally and professionally) to create Society 5.0. It goes further to caution businesses that sometimes the community knows best, and your role is merely to enable, not to dictate.

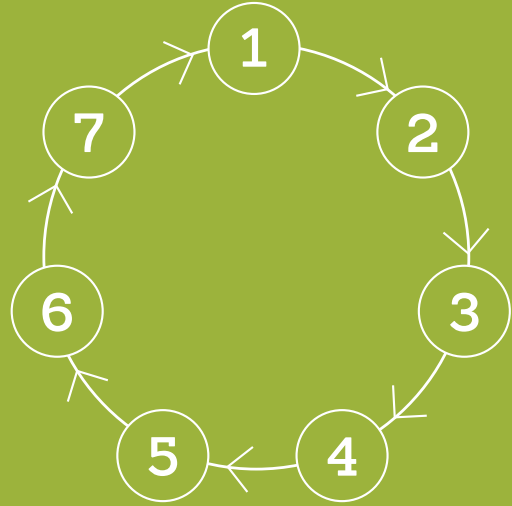


Enabling spaces for dignity:

At the heart of these stories is the idea of *spaces for dignity* – a vital part of regenerative practices. This could involve unlocking individual abundance, rejuvenating local communities, transforming urban areas, preserving natural environments, or rethinking healthcare technologies. Each example shows how creating and maintaining spaces that respect and enhance human dignity is essential to regeneration. These physical or conceptual spaces act as strongholds of individual and community identity, well-being, and empowerment and support the ubuntu philosophy of “I am because we are.”

6.

Seven steps to becoming a regenerative business



Communities are an inestimable source of value, cultural heritage and memory, local insights, socio-relational bonds, and support structures. Nurturing this wealth can catalyse growth and regeneration, even in areas perceived as under-resourced or

underprivileged. By investing in these communities, businesses can unlock the potential of both individuals and society, fostering a symbiotic relationship that benefits all not only today, but for generations to come.

Seven steps to help a business initiate a regenerative journey include:

1

Adopt an ecosystemic mindset:

- a. Embrace the interconnectedness of your business with the community, environment, and economy.
- b. Integrate the ubuntu philosophy, emphasising empathy, dignity, and shared humanity in all operations, treating stakeholders as essential partners.

2

Commit to community and environmental stewardship:

- a. Actively engage with and invest in local communities and initiatives, reinforcing the concept of spaces for dignity.
- b. Implement environmental stewardship practices that contribute positively to ecological health, aligning with regenerative principles.

3

Foster collaborative partnerships:

- a. Build multi-sectoral alliances to address complex challenges, emphasising the importance of community-centric values.
- b. Share knowledge and resources to drive innovation and collaborative solutions that are beneficial for all stakeholders.

4

Reimagine business practices:

- a. Innovate for social and environmental impact, seeking “green swan” opportunities for transformative industry changes.
- b. Adopt circular economy principles to minimise waste and maximise resource efficiency, supporting sustainable and inclusive growth.

5

Learn, unlearn, relearn, adapt:

- a. Establish a learning organisation that values feedback and adaptability, and views failures as experiments and opportunities for growth.
- b. Continuously assess and adjust business impacts on social, environmental, and economic parameters, embodying responsible and responsive leadership.

6

Empower through inclusion and diversity:

- a. Develop a workplace that values and respects diverse perspectives, creating spaces for dignity.
- b. Ensure business practices promote equity for all communities served.

7

Promote transparency and accountability:

- a. Maintain transparency in decision-making and operations, build trust among stakeholders, and reinforce the “profit through purpose” concept.
- b. Be accountable for social and environmental impacts, commit to continuous improvement, and report transparently.

7.

Looking ahead



This white paper and its case studies have taken you on a journey exploring the evolving landscape of regenerative futures, regenerative business, interconnected communities, environments, and ecosystems. The goal was not to provide definitive answers, but rather to engage you, the reader, in a substantive dialogue about creating *spaces for dignity*. Although the case studies focused on specific areas, they served as valuable illustrations of the complexities and possibilities inherent in this transformation. They highlight that the future of education,

work, and society lies in our collective ability to embrace a more regenerative, inclusive, and interconnected approach.

As we face the accelerating challenges of the 21st century, this white paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the issues and provide tools for the multidimensional solutions required for a sustainable and dignified future for people and the planet. We encourage you to join us in this vital dialogue as the options before us become increasingly limited and the stakes ever-increasing.

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Appendix A: Overview of methodology

This study investigated regenerative practices in four South African organisations, focusing on *spaces for dignity*. The *interpretive research approach employed a multiple case study design with data collected at multiple levels and analysed through qualitative methods*. The study aimed to understand how corporations transform into regenerative organisations, contributing to regenerative communities and net-positive societal outcomes. The research philosophy was based on the “how” query, with a qualitative study employed to develop inductively and advance theory. The data collection methods included in-depth unstructured interviews with stakeholders and expert interviews to supplement contextual knowledge. The study's sample size was four cases, with multiple data sources, namely interviews, site visits, a TED Talk, project data, and researcher reflections.

The study explores the future of work and the importance of creating spaces for dignity through regenerative business principles through case studies. The selection of cases was based on non-probability purposive sampling, allowing for the examination of internal processes and variations. The cases included: Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital academic-private-

public-civic partnership project 1HEART.1BEAT.4BARA; Nando's in Lorentzville; Victoria Yards; and the clean-up of the Jukskei River. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis and cross-case analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The process involved the iterative examination of transcripts, project data, and participant observation field notes to reduce researcher bias.

Data assurance is crucial in case study research to ensure validity and reliability. This was achieved by eliciting specific information, verifying for clarity during interviews, and fostering an environment for meaning discovery and interpretation. Techniques, such as pattern-matching, explanation-building, and theme identification, were employed to strengthen internal validity. Reliability was improved by a coherent study protocol and database, documenting and presenting data collection procedures, and using an audit trail. Credibility was bolstered by member checking and active participation in the field. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the commencement of the study, and all participants permitted the researcher to reveal corporate and individual identifying information.

Appendix B:

Overview of 1HEART.1BEAT.4BARA outcomes

97% User Satisfaction

- 97% of users reported they are **satisfied** or **very satisfied** with the 1beat app.
- 3% reported as neutral with no negative reviews.
- The survey is based on 32 user responses, all of which are daily to weekly active users of the 1beat app.

Team collaboration

- 90% of users reported the app has **significantly improved** team work

These users chose one of these two statements:

"**Extremely effective** - It has transformed our team coordination and communication, making it seamless and highly efficient."

"**Very effective** - It has significantly improved our team coordination and communication."

Enabling better research

- 90% of users reported that the app will materially enable better research

These users chose one of these two statements:

"**Extremely effective** - I strongly believe that the data captured will greatly transform and expand the extent and quality of research."

"**Very effective** - I am confident that the data captured will significantly improve the extent and quality of research."

Patient care

- 81% of users reported that the app has been **very effective** or **extremely effective** in improving patient care.

These users chose one of these two statements:

"**Extremely effective** - The app has made a meaningful contribution to the improvement of patient care."

"**Very effective** - The app has made a notable contribution, leading to considerable improvements in several areas of patient care."

Time saving per week

Impact

Overall **90%** of users reported the app resulted in time savings
1 hour of time saved can translate into 2 or more elective surgeries per week per 2 doctors

>2 hours

16% of users reported 2 or more hours of time saved per week.

1 to 2 hours

58% reported between 1 to 2 hours saved per week.

30 minutes or more

The remaining users reported at least 30 mins of time saving per week.

Appendix C:

Images from the Water for the Future Jukskei project



Figure C1: Community mural along the Jukskei River
Source: Author's own



Figure C2: Community members who do the clean-up of the Jukskei River and a previously unemployed young woman learning a new skill installing cacti in containers
Source: Author's own – permission was sought and received from the community members to take and use these photos.

About the author

Dr Roze Phillips started Abundance at Work to unlock each person's potential, specifically solving for abundance, dignity, and care at work. Dr Phillips is an African futurist, medical doctor, non-executive director of companies, educator, public speaker, and radio talk show host. She serves on the Board of Directors of Netcare, Spear REIT and the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS; the University of Pretoria's business school) in South Africa. She works as an adjunct faculty member with GIBS's Centre for Business Ethics, focusing on spaces for dignity, social and environmental justice, and the future of work. Previously, Dr Phillips was head of Management Consulting, head of Innovation, and head of the Consumer Goods and Services Industry Sector for Accenture in Africa, as well as group executive of People and Culture for Absa, a major Pan-African Bank. Dr Phillips has a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, a Master of Business Administration (MBA), and a Postgraduate Diploma (Futures Studies). She completed her studies at the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, Copenhagen Business School, and Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health.

About the editor

Jeri-Lee Mowers is the founder and chief project officer of the Research Advisory Institute of South Africa. She has 20 years of experience spanning project and asset management, strategy development and implementation, coaching, facilitation, and scientific research (as editor, technical coach, writing coach, examiner, and supervisor). Jeri-Lee has a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, a Master of Engineering, and an MBA cum laude. She has also completed the Municipal Minimum Competency Levels and is currently a PhD candidate at Rhodes Business School. She has been an internationally accredited Project Management Professional with the Project Management Institute since 2012.

Endnote

This work is that of the author. However, Grammarly was used to improve the grammar and readability of the white paper.

Abundance At Work (Pty) Ltd pioneers a new standard in workplace potential.

At Abundance At Work we aim to ignite innovation and drive meaningful change across Africa. Guided by the enduring philosophy of Ubuntu – 'I am because we are' – we pave the way to abundance, promoting dignity, care, and inclusive, responsible leadership. Adopting principles of Regenerative Business, we help strengthen the connection between business and society and fuel sustainable growth for economies. Our mission is to revolutionise global norms of how the world learns, works and lives, fostering a future of work where every person can unleash their full potential and thrive.

With extensive experience in strategic foresight, business strategy consulting, and leadership development, we co-design with clients to deliver fit-for-purpose journeys towards regeneration. We empower leaders at every level to embrace abundance mindsets, equipping them with the skills to drive sustainable and inclusive growth and future-fitness.

GIBS Centre for Business Ethics

The Centre for Business Ethics (CfBE) aims to explore and influence how South African businesses can respond more ethically to the country's challenges, facilitating open conversations that build trust and helping to secure a more successful, sustainable future both for the business community and the country. The CfBE connects academia, business, and society, locally and internationally, to co-create ethical solutions, while inspiring and enabling leaders to think, feel, and act in the interests of our shared future. It has worked to bring people together and generate creative insights and rigorous ideas that can be translated into educational programmes for students and pragmatic plans of action for organisational leaders.

GIBS established the CfBE (then known as the Ethics and Governance Think Tank) under Rabbi Gideon Pogrand in 2016 – a groundbreaking initiative and the first project of its kind in South Africa. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, a network of over 800 business schools worldwide, named the CfBE as one of its Innovations that Inspire in 2018.



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