

CRITICAL BOOK CONVERSATION

Organizing the Common Good: From Corporate Purpose to a Collective Process

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Book: Detchessahar, M., Ezvan, C. & Frémeaux, S. (Eds.). (2024). *L'entreprise au défi de l'écologie intégrale. Penser et agir pour une économie du bien commun*. Nouvelle Cité.

In July 2026, 4 years before the deadline set by the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations' report on the Sustainable Development Goals found that only 36% of the 139 assessable targets were on track or showing moderate progress. Nearly half were progressing too slowly, and 15% had regressed since 2015 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2026). This assessment highlights the gap between widely recognized collective goals and their implementation. The challenge now lies in the ability of institutions and organizations to translate them into coordinated decisions, sustainable investments, and new ways of producing, working, and cooperating.

This is precisely the question addressed by *L'entreprise au défi de l'écologie intégrale. Penser et agir pour une économie du bien commun*, a collective volume edited by Detchessahar et al. (2024). From the perspective adopted by the authors, the common good refers to the conditions that enable individuals and the community to flourish together: It is defined as 'the sum of social conditions that enable people to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily'¹ (pp. 11–12), in other words, 'the good of us all' (p. 12). Integral ecology broadens this conception by holding together issues that are 'inseparably linked, and environmental, human, and social in nature' (p. 10), jointly considering human development, social justice, future generations, and interdependencies with the living world and the biosphere (p. 12). Detchessahar et al. (2024) make explicit the book's guiding idea: the choices that guide and organize work (what is produced, how it is produced, and the effects of this activity on people and nature) cannot be guided solely by technical questions – 'is it feasible?' – or economic ones – 'is it profitable?' They must also be subject to an ethical question: 'is

it good?' (p. 26). The book thus examines the purposes that guide activity, the conceptions of work it conveys, and the forms of life to which it contributes. Bringing together contributions from economic history, philosophy, theology, and management studies, the book comprises a first part devoted to the foundations of integral ecology and a second part examining mechanisms such as responsible finance, employee share ownership, codetermination, mission-led companies, the economy of communion, and ecovillages. This interdisciplinarity reintroduces into management studies an anthropology of work and a reflection on the 'good life', while raising the question of how to translate a grammar partly derived from Christian social thought into pluralistic organizations.

The book's major contribution lies in its ability to repoliticize the question of corporate purpose. It belongs to a body of work that examines, from complementary angles, the systemic transformation of organizations, moving beyond financial performance alone, orienting innovation toward collective missions, and adapting management disciplines to ecological transitions (Alexandre & Lameta, 2024; Barneto et al., 2025; Bollinger & Schaeffer, 2024; Giorgini, 2014; Lallemand-Stempak & Eynaud, 2022; Levillain et al., 2020; Mazzucato, 2021; Nabec et al., 2026; Noguera & Valéau, 2026). The book's originality lies in the way it explicitly connects these transformations to a reflection on work, the 'good life', and the common good. It thus offers a normative orientation and several courses of action, while their articulation, organizational embedding, and scaling up remain unexplored. The discussion is organized around two themes: orienting innovation and institutionalizing the common good, followed by the development of ecosystem-based cooperation.

From orienting innovation to institutionalizing the common good

The first chapter places innovation at the heart of the discussion. By presenting the company as a 'true civilizational power' (p. 22),

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French are the author's own.

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it emphasizes that, through its choices of products, technologies, and organization, it transforms territories, modes of mobility and consumption, as well as skills, social relations, and ways of working. The company is also a 'collective creation apparatus' (p. 27); it organizes the cooperation of resources and knowledge in order to produce solutions that no actor could develop in isolation. Yet, this power is ambivalent: depending on the purposes that govern it, it can improve living conditions and preserve environments, or intensify resource extraction and degrade work. The challenge of integral ecology is therefore less to limit this power than to question how it is used.

Putting the book into dialogue with research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and innovation leads to a distinction between two dimensions. The first concerns the development of innovation capacity. When integrated into strategy, CSR can consolidate the organization's resources and encourage teams to develop new solutions (Bollinger et al., 2023). The second concerns the orientation of this capacity. *L'entreprise au défi de l'écologie intégrale* extends this approach by examining the purposes to which innovation is devoted. Its strategic or commercial value is no longer sufficient to establish its worth; this must also be assessed in light of its contribution to the common good, its effects on the living world, and the quality of the work it organizes.

The courses of action proposed in the book can be read as organizational and institutional innovations. They redefine purposes, governance rules, employee participation, financing methods, and relations with stakeholders. To assess their transformative reach, this review proposes three levels of analysis: their diffusion, their organizational embedding, and their institutionalization. This framework, which is not formulated as such in the book, makes it possible to assess the extent to which the mechanisms presented move beyond the stage of intention or local experimentation.

The first level is diffusion. More than 2,500 mission-led companies were listed (Communauté des entreprises à mission, n.d.) in July 2026, but they remain a very small minority within the French business landscape. The Danone case also reminds us that adopting a legal status is not enough to regulate tensions between social mission, profitability, and shareholder power (Levillain et al., 2022).

The second level concerns organizational embedding: do stated purposes actually transform strategy, work, and governance? The section 'Re-Enchanting the Relationship with Work' provides a useful criterion for assessment. Ecological conversion concerns not only individual behaviors but also 'the ways in which production and consumption are organized, and companies' organizational and management practices' (p. 85). Work should thus become a place of 'multifaceted personal development', where creativity, capability development, the enactment of values, and relationships with others can be expressed (p. 87). As an illustration external to the

book, the Japanese Ricoh Group offers a stimulating translation of this ambition through its mission 'Fulfillment through Work' (Ricoh, n.d.), which connects the automation of routine tasks, creativity, and a sustainable future. Although inspiring, this purpose can be regarded as authentic only if it is actually experienced by employees and translated into decisions, managerial practices, and resource allocation (Durand & Huynh, 2024; Schaefer et al., 2019). The British company Gripple illustrates another dimension of organizational embedding, namely, governance. As a one hundred per cent employee-owned company, the company relies on the GLIDE (Gripple, n.d.) mechanism to organize employee representation vis-à-vis management. These examples thus highlight two different ways of translating purposes within the organization: one through work design and strategic orientation, the other through ownership and participation in decision-making. Yet, the latter remains weakly diffused. In France, only 9% of unlisted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) used employee share ownership in 2025, even though 86% of the companies surveyed had a positive view of it (Eres, 2025). These two examples show that re-enchanting work requires both transforming its content and giving employees greater influence over the decisions that organize it.

The third level is institutionalization: are organizational transformations supported and diffused by broader regulatory and institutional frameworks? Regulation, which the book presents as one of the levers of this transformation, itself follows nonlinear trajectories. In Europe, the Omnibus I package led to Directive (EU) 2026/470 (European Union, 2026), which effectively sets thresholds of more than 1,000 employees and more than €450 million in net turnover. According to the European Commission, this revision reduces by around 85% the number of companies subject to sustainability reporting requirements (European Commission, 2026). In the United States, on 29 May 2026, the Securities and Exchange Commission proposed fully rescinding the federal climate disclosure rules adopted in 2024. However, this rescission is not yet final, as the proposal has been submitted for public consultation (US Securities and Exchange Commission, 2026). At the same time, in December 2025, China issued a trial national standard on companies' disclosure of climate-related risks, opportunities, and impacts. Its application remains voluntary until its scope and mandatory implementation arrangements have been specified (Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China et al., 2025). These divergent trajectories show that the strengthening of institutional sustainability frameworks is neither uniform nor irreversible.

These three levels should not be conflated. Thus, a practice may spread without profoundly changing decisions; an experiment may transform an organization while remaining isolated; regulation may advance and then be scaled back. These contrasting findings do not call into question the relevance of the

paths proposed by the book. They nevertheless reveal one of its limitations: although it documents numerous forms of transformation, it analyzes less precisely the processes that would enable them to be articulated, stabilized, and scaled up. One question therefore remains open: *how can these initiatives be durably embedded in organizations and enabled to produce effects beyond the contexts in which they have been tested?* This question echoes Frémeaux's observation that the pursuit of the common good remains an 'unfinished, often hesitant process', and that integral ecology 'is not a matter of mere discourse' (p. 227). Orienting innovation toward the common good also requires determining who is legitimate to define project selection criteria, arbitrate between divergent interests, and decide which innovations will be financed, developed, or abandoned. Because these choices are intrinsically political, governance determines which actors participate in trade-offs, what rights are recognized for them, and how their disagreements can be expressed and worked through. The book forcefully asserts the need to deliberate on corporate purposes, while leaving open how competing conceptions of the common good can be arbitrated within pluralistic organizations. Because the issues concerned extend beyond the boundaries of the company, this governance must also be considered at the ecosystem level.

Developing cooperation at the ecosystem level

The common good extends beyond the boundaries of the company. The challenges it encompasses are global and interdependent and affect populations far beyond the places where decisions are made. No organization, however committed, possesses on its own the knowledge, resources, and legitimacy needed to address them. The book opens this perspective when it emphasizes that the common good 'cannot be invoked as a mere incantation' but must be 'co-constructed, co-developed' through the concrete articulation of economic, political, and social choices (p. 85). The book thus establishes the principle of a collective construction of the common good. Yet, the mechanisms through which heterogeneous organizations coordinate their contributions, arbitrate disagreements, and stabilize a shared orientation remain more in the background. This question resonates with the 2025 special issue of *M@n@gement* devoted to ecosystem innovation for sustainability. Barlatier et al. (2025) view ecosystems as interfaces enabling heterogeneous actors to align their learning and connect local experiments to systemic transformations. This work thus extends one of the main research agendas opened up by the book: identifying the mechanisms through which the common good can be constructed and governed beyond the boundaries of a single organization.

Building on this intuition, our review mobilizes the concept of the *middleground* as a complementary analytical framework for studying the conditions of this collective action.

Initially developed in the analysis of creative ecosystems, it refers to the intermediate structure linking the *underground* (individuals, communities, and informal initiatives) to the *upperground* (companies, public authorities, and formal institutions). Through places, spaces, events, and projects, the *middleground* facilitates encounters among actors, the translation of heterogeneous knowledge, experimentation with ideas, and their gradual transformation into projects that can be supported and institutionalized (Cohendet et al., 2010, 2011). Its value in extending the book lies in its focus on the mediations through which a normative purpose can become a collective project. Ozor et al. (2024) show in particular how projects and events can bring heterogeneous actors into relation and support experimentation within an innovation ecosystem. Transposing this concept to integral ecology therefore constitutes a research avenue to explore. Such a transposition invites examination of how these spaces translate the common good into collective projects, who creates, funds, and governs them, and under what conditions they can avoid capture by the most powerful actors. It also leads to the study of the processes through which localized experiments can durably transform organizations and institutions. Qualitative, comparative, and longitudinal research would be particularly relevant for understanding these mechanisms.

L'entreprise au défi de l'écologie intégrale thus contributes to management studies by combining a framework and a set of organizational mechanisms capable of orienting the company toward the common good. One of its main contributions is to move beyond a conception of responsibility centered solely on correcting externalities by jointly examining the purposes of production, the organization of work, and modes of participation in decision-making. Although the book forcefully illuminates the purpose of transformation and several of its levers, the conditions for their articulation, institutionalization, and diffusion at a larger scale require further investigation. Research on innovation ecosystems and the concept of the *middleground* offer, in this respect, a promising avenue for further development by inviting us to understand the common good as the always provisional outcome of collective processes of coordination, experimentation, and governance.

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