Introduction

There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why?
I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?
Robert Kennedy, based on George Bernard Shaw, Back to Methuselah

Many of us, from time to time, have imagined a world that is better than the one we have now. It is quintessentially human to see our world as it is—riddled with poverty, war, disease, environmental degradation and all the other ills we have wrought upon it through the course of our history—and envision in its place a world of beauty in which we have put an end to these myriad afflictions and learned to live in harmony with the earth and with each other.

None of us is quite sure how we might create that world. But most of us would not think immediately of harnessing the innovative powers of business as a means to getting there. A growing number of people, however, are doing precisely that—devising new products and services that are improving the quality of human life, and helping to mitigate climate change and other adverse environmental impacts—crucially, while creating commercial value for their companies.

Those people are called social intrapreneurs.

We define social intrapreneurs as ‘people within a large corporation who take direct initiative for innovations that address social or environmental challenges while also creating commercial value for the company’.

The first recorded use of the terms ‘intrapreneur’, ‘intrapreneuring’ and ‘intrapreneurship’ dates from a paper written by Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978). Later the term was credited to Gifford Pinchot by Norman Macrae in The Economist (1982).

The term ‘social intrapreneur’ was first defined by SustainAbility (2008) as:
1. Someone who works inside major corporations or organisations to develop and promote practical solutions to social or environmental challenges where progress is currently stalled by market failures
2. Someone who applies the principles of social entrepreneurship inside a major organisation
3. One characterised by an ‘insider–outsider’ mind-set and approach
Other definitions include the following:

Social intrapreneurs … are responding to perceived shortcomings in society and utilize the resources of the firm to provide market based solutions to address them (Bode and Santos 2013). Employees who identify opportunities for social innovation within their corporation or organisation, playing a part in making businesses better from the inside out (Mitchell 2013). A new breed of business professional … finding creative —and in many cases disruptive —ways to tackle some of society’s toughest problems and create long-term value for their companies as well (McGaw 2013).

Two thirds changemaker, one third troublemaker (Bulloch 2013).

Typically, as Josh Cleveland who has written and championed the concept with the student movement Net Impact says, social intrapreneurs are ‘going against the grain a bit’.

1 They are looking to create what Harvard strategy guru Michael Porter describes as ‘Shared Value’ (Harvard Business Review 2011. This value-creation process typically engages individuals or organisations beyond the boundaries of their companies in unusual cross-border alliances. Deborah Leipziger, corporate responsibility consultant, and Cheryl Kiser, Director of Babson Social Innovation Lab, explore how entrepreneurial leaders in companies develop such alliances, even co-creating partnerships with competitors, to generate profits and social value in Creating Social Value (Kiser and Leipziger 2014).

Social intrapreneurs are challenging their organisation, questioning the status quo to develop and implement commercially attractive sustainability solutions. Hence another description: ‘corporate provocateurs’. Often, at least initially, their intrapreneurial activity is not part of their job. This is why some social intrapreneurs talk of their day job and their job that they do in their spare time at weekends and night-time: ‘moonlighting’ for their own employer!

We think the distinctive features of social intrapreneurs are that they:

- Work for for-profit enterprises
- Treat social or environmental problems as business opportunities
- Drive innovations that create value for business and society

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1 From interview with Josh Cleveland, 9 June 2010.
2 While we acknowledge, as our colleague Maggie De Pree has pointed out, that ‘there are intrapreneurs working in government and NGOs as well’, we have focused on the work of social intrapreneurs within companies in this book.
The value of studying social intrapreneurs lies in their potential to develop solutions to our global challenges by virtue of their positions in organisations that manage significant resources and power. Social intrapreneur Gib Bulloch at Accenture explains: ‘Affecting even small change in large organisations can lead to significant positive social impact’ (SustainAbility 2008).

Unlike their ‘close relatives’, such as corporate volunteers, corporate responsibility (CR) champions or green team members inside companies who are also furthering social and environmental goals, social intrapreneurs aim to generate entirely new forms of commercial value through significant innovations in products, services, processes or business models for their employers. However, as will become evident from the examples in our book, these diverse members of the corporate ‘family’ may find themselves working together as an ‘ensemble’ to enhance the sustainability performance of their companies.

In contrast with social entrepreneurs, social intrapreneurs can leverage existing infrastructures and organisational capabilities to deliver social value on a large scale. That fact alone tips the odds in favour of social intrapreneurs achieving large-scale social change, as *The Economist* (2008) suggested in a review of a book about social entrepreneurs:

The greatest agents for sustainable change are unlikely to be the well-intentioned folk described in this book, interesting though they are. They are much more likely to be the entirely reasonable people, often working for large companies, who see ways to create better products or reach new markets, and have the resources to do so.

At the 2008 World Economic Forum in Davos, Bill Gates called on business leaders to support the work of social innovators in their own companies:

I hope corporations will dedicate a percentage of their top innovators’ time to issues that could help people left out of the global economy. This kind of contribution is even more powerful than giving cash or offering employees’ time off to volunteer. It is a focused use of what your company does best. It is a great form of creative capitalism, because it takes the brainpower and makes life better for the richest, and dedicates some of it to improving the lives of everyone else (Gates 2008).

However, many companies do not yet recognise this. Sharon Parker is a professor in organisational psychology at the University of Western Australia’s Business School. Her recent research projects on proactive behaviour and responses to it have explored the motivations of social intrapreneurs and how they generate change in organisations. She notes:
Trying to effect change gives an individual meaning and purpose. It enhances their learning and is exciting—and it’s a great way to develop networks. But at the same time it’s quite risky behaviour. Usually there’s some resistance from somewhere and you can’t anticipate what’s going to happen. Businesses are set up to deliver profit and that’s their dominant logic, so anyone trying to make profit and be a social intrapreneur is going to potentially come up across resistance (Knowledge@Australian School of Business 2011).

Emma Stewart, Head of Sustainability Solutions at Autodesk and professional faculty at University of California, Berkeley, adds that:

Social intrapreneurs are employees who, in lieu of starting their own social enterprise, brave the stormy landscape of corporate politics to get their disruptive ideas to market and to more customers sooner, and therefore with greater environmental or social impact. It was social intrapreneurs who first conceived GE’s Ecomagination product lines, Intel’s super-efficient water reuse programmes, and Levi’s Water<Less™ jeans (Stewart 2013).

We began studying this fascinating but rare ‘species’, described first in a ‘field guide’ produced by our colleagues at SustainAbility (2008). Why? At the Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility, our purpose is to research, and to teach and advise current and future business people on building and developing more responsible, sustainable businesses. But we are interested in how people at all levels of a company, whether they are working at senior director level or elsewhere in the organisation, get interested in trying to build sustainable businesses in the first place. And we are particularly interested in discovering why and how inventive business people are using the power of their companies to help tackle wide-ranging issues such as climate change, poverty and disease—big global problems that previous generations would not have believed businesses could, or even should, try to address.

**So what do social intrapreneurs do?**

Here is a small selection of what our research interviews—with over 40 social intrapreneurs as well as with others who have studied and supported their work—revealed that social intrapreneurs and their allies have already achieved:
• Creation of microinsurance products for low-income people and businesses unable to afford conventional insurance schemes (Allianz)

• Start-up of a business unit within a large parcel delivery corporation to improve operational efficiency while ameliorating climate change impacts (DHL)

• Introduction of a marketing strategy to help clients reduce their carbon footprint by promoting use of the company’s information technology services (Telstra)

• Reduction of a large brewing company’s production costs to improve competitiveness in developing countries through partnerships with local growers (SABMiller)

• Development of a micro-energy project within a major energy generation corporation to boost productivity and address poverty in developing countries (E.ON Energie)

• Launch of an alternative energy business within a major oil company to service customers in emerging markets (BP)

• Establishment of a ‘green’ advertising network as a new business stream within a major media company (The Guardian)

• Development of ‘sustainable IT’ service streams at a major engineering company (Siemens)

• Creation of a coalition within a major energy provider to address problems of fuel poverty (E.ON UK)

• Development of ethically produced sustainable product lines at a landscape paving company through partnerships with overseas suppliers (Marshalls)

• Creation of dialogue with a Brazilian community to develop a supply chain relationship at a personal care products company (Natura)

• Development of a commercially viable business unit within an engineering consultancy to address third-world poverty issues (Arup)

• Engineering of environmentally sustainable production processes at a global chemicals company (BASF)

• Development of sustainability strategy and network at a nuclear engineering company (Cavendish Nuclear)
• Creation of a specialty risk reinsurance company focused on climate change and carbon trading exposures (Marsh)

• Capacity-building and creation of partnerships to leverage and develop management expertise for international development (Accenture)

• Development of a commercially sustainable strategy for marketing pharmaceutical products to low-income customers in developing countries (Novartis)

In this book we present a selection of their stories and what we, and they, have learned from their journeys. We hope to inspire others to follow in their pioneering footsteps and join a growing movement of individuals who are helping to build a better, more sustainable world through their ‘day jobs’.

Why are these stories important? Because they prove that work can, and should be, more than ‘just a job’; it can be a fulfilling means to making the world a better place. Social intrapreneurism, we believe, is a gateway to an entirely new way of doing business: creating value, not just for investors, but for society as a whole. Businesses need to be recognised for what they truly are—not isolated entities operating in bubbles but value-generating (and potentially value-destroying) communities, interconnected with the wider world through networks of employees, suppliers, customers and others. We look forward to a future era in which it will be commonplace for inventive minds to design products and services that not only are commercially profitable but also address the world’s most pressing social, environmental and economic challenges.

Perhaps you, a reader of this book, will be a leader in that future. If so, we look forward to meeting you and learning more about the great work you will be doing.