

Dr. Saeed Rahman Explores the Regeneration Economy



In his recently defended dissertation, Dr. Saeed Rahman, PhD '20, presented a new slant on the emerging idea of integrating ecological and business knowledge. Through dozens of interviews, his research explored how farmers in BC seek, create and use ecological knowledge in their businesses, and what the implications of this might be for other industries. Rahman is the fifth graduate of the Sardul S. Gill Graduate School's Doctor of International Management program.

During his research Rahman engaged farmers on the topic of sustainability and clearly remembers one response. "This person said: 'I don't believe in sustainability. Sustainability is the idea that we can keep taking at the rate that we've always been taking. Sustainability is over. Now, the new economy is about the regeneration economy,'" he recalls.

Rahman had assumed ecological knowledge—a cumulative body of knowledge about an organization's interrelationships with nature—might be a new concept for business. He was surprised and fascinated to find many agricultural businesses had already reframed their ideas away from sustainability and towards regeneration as a necessary shift to protect the ecosystem and the longevity of their businesses. It became a key theme among his findings.

In his research, Rahman identified common trends among success cases of these sustainably-minded businesses. His 10-dimension process model—an outline of what worked for some businesses as they sought to become more sustainable—maps how ecological knowledge can be accessed, co-created and integrated into existing business strategy. The model starts with a business being willing to look beyond traditional organizational boundaries and see itself as embedded in the whole ecosystem. Timing is also a factor.

"When you look at most traditional business models, they are focused on fast, short-term output. The knowledge they require to produce short-term results has to be accessible to them quickly. Ecological knowledge does not come quickly."

CSSI director Monika Winn, who was Rahman's PhD supervisor, had introduced the theoretical concept of ecological knowledge to sustainability research in prior papers with her co-author Stefano Pogutz. She notes that—in addition to the dissertation's theoretical contributions—it has considerable practical importance in that it enables organizations to build this knowledge right into their socially and economically sustainable business models.



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