



THE LEADERSHIP ROLE IN COMBATTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson

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After her keynote address at IMI's 2019 National Management Conference for senior Irish business leaders, we asked Katharine Wilkinson to share her insights on the role leaders can play in combatting climate change.

Based on your current work – if you had only a few words of advice to give a business, what would they be?

Climate change call for transformational leadership in our businesses. That challenge should be taken personally by all business leaders.

What is that challenge exactly?

Climate change is many things: planetary challenge, pressing crisis, potential catalyst. I find it is helpful to think of climate change as fundamental feedback from our planet—that the way much of human society has been operating is not working.

Stasis is decidedly not on the menu of options to get

it working again, and transformation is coming one way or another. In fact, transformation is already here.

The choice we have is whether we will be active participants in reshaping our economies, cultures, and organizations. I would argue that there's not only a moral argument to lead from the front, but a business one too.

What's our goal? Can we even define one?

To come back into balance with the planet's living systems, we must aim for 'drawdown': the future point in time when concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere stop rising, and actually begin to decline.

It's an essential turning point for life on this planet. Our work at Project Drawdown documents the many climate solutions already in hand. But solutions do not scale themselves. We need a step-change in leadership to move solutions forward, with the aim of reaching drawdown quickly, safely, and equitably.



Dr. Katharine Wilkinson addressing the 2019 National Management Conference

As an author, strategist, and researcher, I am constantly moving through the landscape of climate action—countries, companies, cities, civil society, and beyond—and have the privilege of working with some true pioneers in this space. I see five fundamental shifts required for transformational leadership in a climate-changed and climate-changing world.

What are those fundamental shifts?

First, a shift from seeking silver bullets to supporting a system of solutions, in which all have roles to play.

Second, a shift from single problem solving to multi-solving for climate as well as equality and wellbeing.

Third, a shift in aspiration from sustainability to regeneration, to meet the magnitude of the challenge.

Fourth, a shift from competition to collaboration as the primary modus operandi.

And fifth, a shift from predominantly head-centered to equally heart-centered approaches.

Transformational, life-supporting leadership is not a draconian assignment.

The situation we face is actually an invitation into the most meaningful work imaginable.

Purpose, despite all the fuss, is not tricky, nor illusive. At this moment, creating a liveable future is our purpose as humans.

The question we might ask ourselves is “What would it mean for us—for me—to rise to the challenge of climate change and lead towards a life-giving future?”

Dr Katharine Wilkinson is a renowned expert, strategist and senior writer of the New York Times bestseller, 'Drawdown', the most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming.