

Ecosynomics

THE SCIENCE OF
ABUNDANCE

\\Ē-KO-SI-'NÄ-MIKS\\

JAMES
RITCHIE-DUNHAM
WITH
BETTYE PRUITT

Praise for *Ecosynomics: The Science of Abundance*

“Ecosynomics translates and drives the natural phenomenon that occur within human interactions, allowing the achievement of much greater results than normally expected, on a sustainable basis. The application of Ecosynomic principles integrates nature’s processes of value creation, transformation, and propagation into the space of human interactions, structured around cycles of positive feedback and growth in the outcomes and experiences desired.”

~Ana Cláudia Gonçalves, economist and CEO, Global Financial Services IT Company

“Harmonic Vibrancy is the experience that leverages the potential we experience in human interactions, in their creativity, their nature, their light, their spirit, their awareness, and their attention. Ecosynomics provides a framework for making a qualitative jump in the harmonic vibrancy experienced, transforming towards a more equitable world of opportunities, wellbeing, and happiness for all.”

~Luis Paiz Bekker, director Oxfam Guatemala, former director of Doctors without Borders
Argentina

“Jim Ritchie-Dunham came to ‘Impuls’ for an evening and shared with us his ideas on harmonic vibrancy and Ecosynomics. It was a deeply inspiring evening for all of us. The time is ripe to bring together the pioneers of sustainable business and show the world that things can be done differently: more collaboratively, more creatively, more peacefully”

~Benjamin Kafka, co-founder and director, Impuls, Agency for applied utopianism, Berlin,
Germany

Any kind of group, even very small ones, can achieve extraordinary things on our way towards a more sustainable society. What makes some groups so special to be able to do that? Can we learn from them for a broader and sustainable transition in society? Ecosynomics provides an appealing lens for seeing the potential of change in how and for what we currently work together.

~Prof. Dr. Martin Welp, Chair of Socioeconomics and Communication, Global Change Management, Faculty of Forest and Environment, Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development

In its ambition to transform human agreements, Ecosynomics does not resort to oversimplification but deals with the true complexity of social interaction and value creation. In revealing the underlying structures and practices that determine how we think, feel and perform individually and as a group, it empowers people to achieve better results and get more out of life.

~Makaio Witte, advisor, financial sector development, Sub-Saharan Africa, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

We at KATE e.V. enjoyed a two-day training in Ecosynomics led by Christoph Hinske, where we explored the implications of our results from the web-based Harmonic Vibrancy survey. We found that the survey questions and results helped clarify our developmental needs, as well as the communication and decision making processes that would best support that development. We were able to then identify our shared values and how to more efficiently meet them, bringing us greater focus on the more important elements, while reducing background noise. Personally, as a director, the Ecosynomic framework helped me see the importance of expressing needs, setting clear agreements, and opening the space for the potential of the individuals and the group.

~Kerstin Wippel, director of KATE (Kontaktstelle für Umwelt und Entwicklung) e.V.

“ASAPreneurs – Shaping a Sustainable World” is an international and widely recognized program that supports young people to gain leadership and entrepreneurial competencies for sustainability. We do so by offering a one year international training cycle in close cooperation with companies and other relevant organizations. Out of years of experience in advanced leadership training and empowerment of young leaders for sustainability, we know that current economic, environmental and social challenges cannot be met by applying the solutions of yesterday. Accordingly, in future, we plan to integrate Ecosynomics in our work and training cycles. We are doing so since we are convinced that innovative management and organizational development approaches are needed to address the challenges humanity is facing. The scientific results, frameworks and tools of Ecosynomics encourage us in our work that is based on collaborative structures, innovative networks and the ability to generate a culture where each individual is invited and able to incubate and implement its own creative activities in order to support a bigger whole. ASAPreneurs is part of the ASA-Program & network which is part of the GLOBAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT gGmbH – Service for Development Initiatives.

~Simone Zeil – Project Manager- Program ASAPreneurs, GLOBAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT gGmbH – Service for Development Initiatives.

Last year I had the chance to experience the framework, insights and tools that Ecosynomics provides, in two different groups. However different these groups were, and my role within them, it was an amazing experience. In both cases we started the process by taking the online survey of the institute. We did so since we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of our group as a whole. The survey results reflected my individual perception of the group and myself as a member of it. Revealing the different dimensions of group performance, the Ecosynomics framework supported and empowered me and the other members to move us in an active and cooperative way forward.

~ Arun Hackenberger, FairBindung e.V.

Both major economic theorists Keynes and Mises, who have dominated monetary policy for over 100 years, make no accommodations in human interactions for time, relationship, possibility, or awareness. Their theories tend to produce win-lose outcomes, which in turn produce a mindset of scarcity and competition. On the other hand, THORLO, Inc., in collaboration with James Ritchie-Dunham and The Institute of Strategic Clarity, has created a dynamic business model that includes all the traditional metrics as well as including the four considerations listed above. We named it “Ecosynomics.” The outcome THORLO is enjoying today, after 10 years of investments, is what we call “synergistic profitability.” This is the synergistic effect of the success of our strategy — Integrated Collaboration Conversations — which results in a safe environment, much like a community or extended family, which has produced an ownership perspective in most of our community. This an environment where the individual who fully engages and participates can become self-aware, self-responsible, and self-reliant, leading to a less stressful and more prosperous life, achieving superior outcomes along the way.

~ Jim Throneburg, founder and CEO, THOR-LO

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First edition.

For those who are finding the way
to greater harmonic vibrancy through their everyday agreements.

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To all of you and the many more I unintentionally missed—thank you!

OVERVIEW

You prefer abundance to scarcity, yet you tend to experience more scarcity than abundance. You know the difference and yet you accept agreements that produce scarcity. You do not have to, and this book will show you why not. It will also show you how to bring abundance into your life.

Economics and Ecosynomics: scarcity and abundance

As any textbook will tell you, economics is the social science of the allocation of scarce resources.¹ It is the dominant social science of the modern era. Economics touches virtually every aspect of material life through its influence on decision making in government and business at every level. Ecosynomics (pronounced ee-co-sin-nom-iks) is brand new and relatively unknown. It builds on the foundation of economics, but goes in quite a different direction by exploring what happens when we start from an assumption of abundance rather than an assumption of scarcity. The mission of this book is to engage many more people in this exploration and, ultimately, to launch a revolution of positive outcomes based on the simple yet momentous shift in perspective that Ecosynomics proposes.

Derived from the Greek roots *eco* (relationship), *syn* (together) and *nomics* (rules), the term Ecosynomics literally means the rules of relationship together, or more broadly, the principles of collaboration.² Thus, it is the social science of the agreements that guide human interaction. It is also the “science of abundance” because it posits that abundance—the state of having plenty of resources, both tangible and intangible—is always available.

Ecosynomics provides a framework for recognizing and creating agreements that enable us to experience abundance in the five most critical relationships in life: our relationships to ourselves, to other individuals, to groups, to nature, and to spirit. When we experience a flourishing relationship, we have a sense of vitality, of vibrancy. The experience of flourishing in all five relationships together I call *harmonic vibrancy*. This is what operating from abundance-based agreements feels like.

In this book, I will show that you know what harmonic vibrancy feels like and where it comes from. I will also share the stories of individuals and groups who have successfully developed agreements that have brought greater abundance and harmonic vibrancy into their lives. These people are discovering innovative ways to work with their resources and organize their interactions to create value for themselves and many others along the way. In my travels and through my research, I have encountered organizations in education, health services, manufacturing and community development that are modeling abundance-based agreements and performing at a much higher level than their peers by all measures of effectiveness and efficient use of resources. They are redefining what is possible.

Moreover, they are part of a large-scale phenomenon, involving many thousands of groups around the world experimenting with the emerging principles of abundance. Over forty-five hundred communities using complementary currencies to create value and provide for people’s needs within the local economy are part of this phenomenon. Also included are thousands of co-operatives of all types, organized in over three hundred federations of co-

operatives in one hundred countries. These organizations are harnessing the strength of large groups to provide their members with greater autonomy and consumer power within the globalized economy. Thousands of groups are turning to asset-based community development, mobilizing untapped cultural and relational resources to improve the lives of their families and neighbors. Over sixty global action networks, with active national organizations in over fifty countries, are leveraging tiny operating budgets to make progress against some of the most intractable global problems, such as corruption, small-arms trafficking, and water conservation. These too are part of the phenomenon that Ecosynomics helps us see and understand.

WHY A SCIENCE OF ABUNDANCE AND WHY NOW?

When we look at the array of problems and challenges societies face today, we typically frame the issues from an assumption of scarcity, in terms of what is lacking: time, money, jobs, natural resources, regulations, leadership, consensus, open mindedness, goodwill, or something else. In contrast, we have no broadly applicable framework for understanding success stories like the ones mentioned above, in which people have created abundance, often in contexts seemingly dominated by scarcity. Ecosynomics offers such a framework.

The need for a science of abundance

As a framework, Ecosynomics shows how a set of fundamental assumptions and the agreements that come from them can explain the extraordinary outcomes groups are creating, based on a new paradigm of abundance. While much is being learned about this new paradigm, I believe that much more is being missed. For example, we are missing the fact that a broad phenomenon is occurring, because we are unaware of the similarities among unconnected and seemingly disparate innovations. We are missing the significance of those innovations because we don't fully understand what makes them innovative. Also because of that lack of understanding, we are missing out on opportunities to build on what these innovators are learning. We need scientific inquiry into the emerging paradigm of abundance if we are going to grasp its meaning and make the most of what it has to offer.

This is the project of science: to build on what has been learned by developing new ideas and testing them rigorously. Science is a systematic process of inquiry. It is also a framework of knowledge expressed in the form of testable explanations and predictions. These are the two goals of science, according to the classic text by Robert Dubin. *Understanding* (explanation) focuses on the interactions among variables in a system, how they relate to each other. *Prediction* focuses on the outcomes of an intervention in the system. The first describes the world being studied and the second looks at how it will behave. Each has its own theory-building processes; together they show how the system works. In the search to learn from and build on what people are discovering about how to experience greater levels of harmonic vibrancy and abundance, we will need to understand human agreements and how these agreements influence the experience we desire. In other words, we need both understanding and prediction.³

Ecosynomics as a science

I present Ecosynomics as a science based on four key elements. First, Ecosynomics builds on past knowledge, in particular the large base of understanding created by economics. Humanity has enjoyed great advances in material wellbeing, due in great part to the economic science of human agreements based in scarcity. The Ecosynomics framework rests on that foundation of knowledge and incorporates a great deal of economic thinking. Second, Ecosynomics, like economics and other sciences, is evidence-based. A founding father of economics, Alfred Marshall, has stated “It is the business of economics, as of almost every other science, to collect facts, to arrange and interpret them, and to draw inferences from them.”⁴ Just so, Ecosynomics has emerged from looking at what is actually happening, developing frameworks to make sense of the evidence and testing that framework against further data.

Third, Ecosynomics provides a framework that integrates existing evidence with previous knowledge to create lenses that enable us to see more clearly what is emerging. Without these lenses, which are a basic feature of scientific development, much of what is being learned would be lost. Finally, Ecosynomics provides a conceptual framework and a common domain of language, which enables people to compare experiences, share what they are learning, improve the framework and apply their insights to practice in different environments. This aspect is critical given the explosive growth of abundance-based agreements that to-date remain mostly unconnected and underappreciated.

The importance of naming

If, as this book suggests, there are many thousands of groups experimenting with agreements based on abundance-based principles, it is time for a naming exercise. There is a need to name what is emerging so that it can be seen more clearly and we can learn from the successes and failures. The act of naming an emerging field of inquiry has had a significant impact on human understanding on various occasions, when new fields have coalesced around a concept or theory that named what many people had been working toward independently, unaware of each other’s efforts.

Perhaps the best-known 20th-century case is the quantum revolution in physics. Around the turn of the century, scientists in various branches of classical Newtonian physics were trying to explain observed phenomena that could not be explained by the axioms of their fields. Then, in 1899, Max Planck introduced the concept of the “quantum,” a discrete quantity of energy proportional in magnitude to the frequency of the radiation it represents. Planck hypothesized that any system (physical, chemical, electrical, etc.) that is composed of atoms and radiates energy can be divided into some number of discrete quanta. This insight opened a door through which hundreds of physicists stepped, including such luminaries as Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr and Erwin Schrodinger. The naming of the quantum made them realize that, with different questions and different tools, they had all been discovering aspects of the same thing, quantum mechanics—a new set of axioms and rules that did not fit with classical physics but described the world from a completely different perspective. Quantum mechanics quickly became, according to physicists, “one of the three great pillars supporting our understanding of the natural world.”⁵

Another relevant example is the emergence of the field of systems theory. While many people cooperated in naming this field in the 1950s, credit usually goes to Ludwig von Bertalanffy for introducing the terminology of “general systems theory” in academic lectures and publications starting in the late 1930s.⁶ A biologist, von Bertalanffy found that much of the behavior he observed was unexplainable within the prevailing scientific view that living organisms are closed systems, to which the laws of physics must apply. He proposed instead a concept of open systems. Such systems, von Bertalanffy realized, operate organically rather than mechanistically, and their behavior is determined by the relationships among the parts, not by the parts themselves. In working to understand the dynamics of system behavior, he recognized that others were dealing with the same issues in different contexts, for example, in cybernetics, and that the systems perspective could usefully be applied to many different fields in both the physical and social sciences. In proposing a general systems theory he did not offer a single unified theory of systems but rather, in the words of Ervin László, “a new paradigm for the development of theories.”⁷

This vision became reality in the mid-1950s when the formation of the Society for General Systems Research brought together leading thinkers, not only in biology and cybernetics, but also in mathematics, economics, philosophy, psychiatry, anthropology, computer science, engineering, sociology and political science. In a very short period, experts who had been disconnected from each other by their professional language, practice, methods and standards were able to create a rich, textured shared understanding of system behaviors they had all been separately struggling to understand. Through this naming of the territory where their insights converged, these new systems thinkers were able to learn from each other’s innovations and apply them to their own fields, accelerating the development of understanding and applications in many arenas.

Today, as in the examples of quantum and systems theories, it appears that thousands of observers across many fields of study are noticing a new phenomenon emerging across the globe. These include psychologists looking at happiness, sociologists looking at complementary monetary systems, economists addressing poverty, and foundations dealing with network philanthropy. They are all dealing with findings that cannot be explained solely by the economic laws of scarcity and self-interest. Ecosynomics provides a model of health to begin to name the field these observers and practitioners are discovering.

For example, within the deficit-focused field of psychology that addresses mental health disorders, psychologists looking at happiness have discovered a complementary pathway beyond treating illness to nurturing human flourishing through a focus on individual strengths and virtues.⁸ The Ecosynomic model of health highlights how these positive psychology discoveries are shining a light into a more complete picture of full-human health of the individual, and how this new image points the way to potential advances in understanding one's relationship to the other, the group, nature, and spirit.

Likewise, within the global network of national monetary systems, designed as scarce, Central-Bank-based currencies, sociologists and economists looking at community health have uncovered over 5,000 examples of local currencies designed as abundance-based currencies that promote sustainable, local relationships and local development, finding creative ways to match local unmet needs with local unused resources in ways that national currencies have not.⁹ The Ecosynomic model shows that one of the key innovations in the

complementary currencies is the sociological framing of agreements. What most of us assume to be a given, our national currency, is actually simply a set of agreements that people can choose.

Surfacing from within an economic development, anti-poverty approach that assumes scarcity-based competition, behavioral economists have discovered the impact of the scarcity mindset on the experience of poverty and that community development based on the assets the community has, its existing strengths, leads to strong, sustainable results without the need to create long-term financial-aid dependencies.¹⁰ Ecosynomics frames this scarcity mindset and view of a community's assets as the starting point in the core assumptions that influence one's experience and outcomes, focusing on the resources one sees as available within any group.

Relevance to you

You might be asking, “Why should I care about Ecosynomics?” This is a great question because it forces me to pull everything together concisely. So, let me be clear that Ecosynomics can benefit you in two important ways. First, as I have stated, the essence of Ecosynomics is the definition of the principles of collaboration. Greater understanding of how to collaborate is valuable to anyone who is part of a group—that is, to everyone. Whether the group is a family, a neighborhood or community, a spiritual or volunteer group, a school, a team or any group you may work with, collaboration will make the group and you more effective at achieving the outcomes you aim for.

If you think of being effective in terms of being more effective than others—being competitive—collaboration will enable you to do that as well. The collaborators I describe in this book play the competitive game much better than do those who focus only on competition. By competition I mean where rivals interact to win something at each other's expense.¹¹ These collaborators are more competitive, more able to win in an interaction, because they work continuously with creative possibility and are always looking deeply at the potential of everyone in their group. They can choose to develop the capacities they need when they need them and so have much greater capacities to play the competitive game. If you think in terms of competition, Ecosynomics will help you by showing you that there is a much broader game out there than just competing head-to-head with an opponent. Ecosynomics shows groups how to focus the competitive mindset internally, striving to continuously strengthen their own capacities, and striving to see how much of their own creative potential they can embody.¹²

The second great benefit of Ecosynomics is freedom, in particular the freedom to develop your full potential for harmonic vibrancy in the five primary relationships. The source of this freedom is the recognition that your experiences are shaped by agreements, whether or not you are aware of them. This means that you do not have to accept scarcity as “just the way things are.”¹³

My vision

In this formative stage of the field of Ecosynomics, there is one thing of which I am very clear: Ecosynomics is not replacing economics; it is building on that foundation. This path of development is one of “transcending and including,” that is, incorporating the best of what has been seen before while moving beyond it. Many great economic thinkers have wrestled with the difficult questions about human existence and through their deep work arrived at extraordinary insights. Because of this, humanity can see further and build a stronger future.

The advances humanity has made in the era of economics have been tremendous. Yet, it is not okay that much of humanity still experiences deep scarcity, because of the agreements in which they live. They can shift those agreements. I believe that naming the emerging field of Ecosynomics, making it visible and understandable, will support the movement to higher harmonic vibrancy that is happening globally, increase its momentum and spread its benefits to a much greater portion of humankind. Said more boldly, I believe everyone deserves the opportunity to experience a higher level of harmonic vibrancy and abundance in their lives. Ecosynomics can create this opportunity by providing the means by which more people can connect to and benefit from what is being learned about collaboration.

THE PATHWAY WE EXPLORE

I would like you to approach this book as a pathway into the science of abundance. As

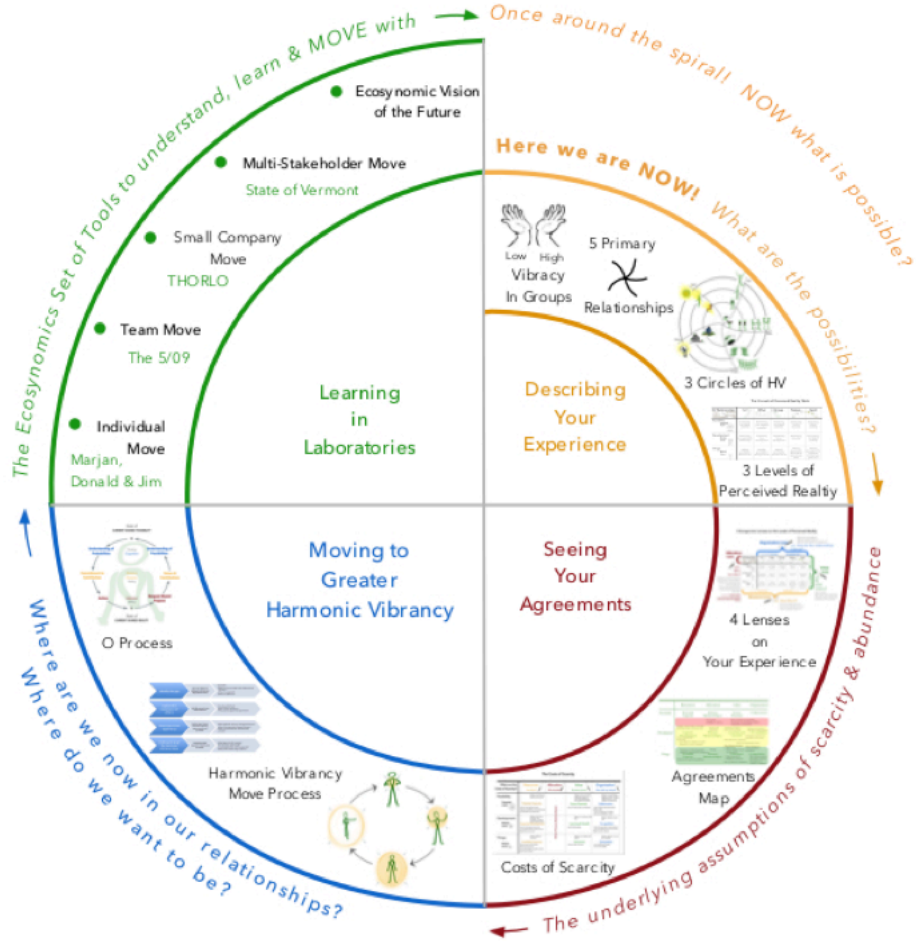


Figure 1 depicts, I envision this pathway as a spiral. From your initial discovery of the basic principles of Ecosynomics, I hope this book will carry you along to a level of understanding from which you can move on to working with this framework and increasing the vibrancy and abundance you experience in all your relationships.

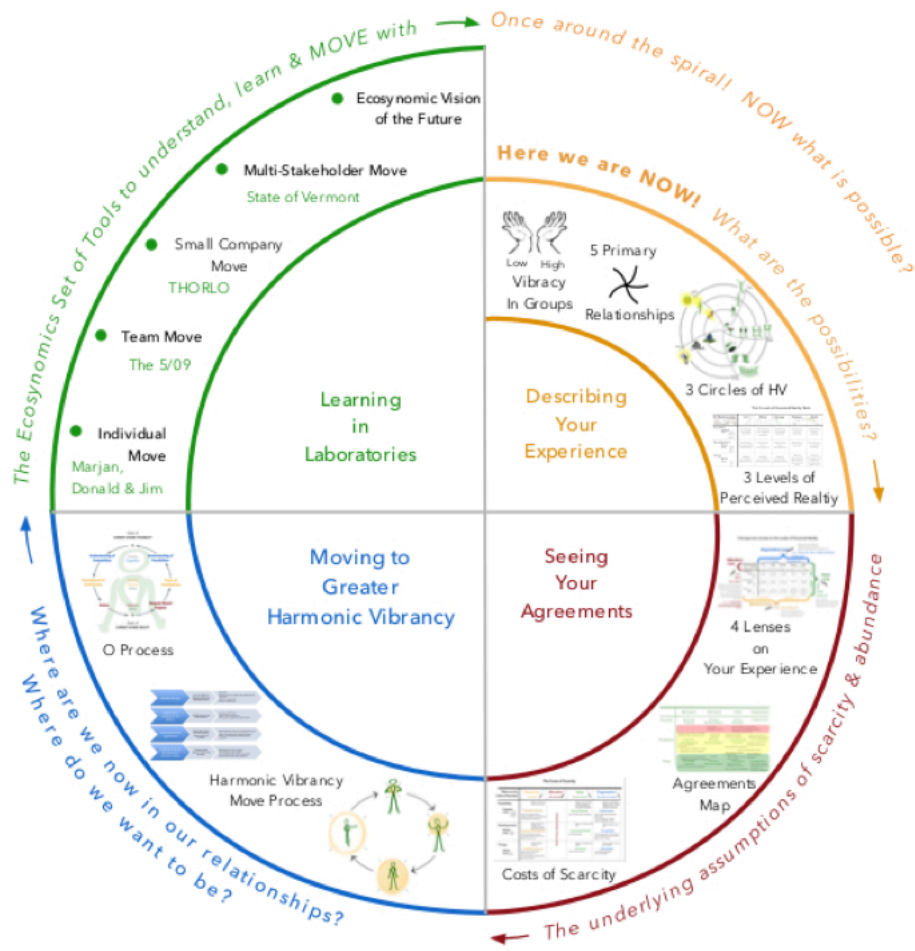


Figure 1: The Pathway We Explore

Part 1 shows you how the building blocks of the main framework for seeing human agreements are already part of your experience. We start in Chapter 1 by reviewing your experiences of groups and situations, great and awful. We will also uncover the main components of all experiences, the five primary relationships—to one’s self, to other individuals, to groups, to nature and to spirit. You will see that you know the difference between scarcity and abundance, low and high vibrancy, in these relationships. You will also recognize that you prefer the high-vibrancy experiences yet seldom have them because, most likely without thinking about it, you accept agreements that produce scarcity.

In Chapter 2, we explore further this idea of agreements. You will see how, based on our perceptions of reality, we all make certain assumptions and our assumptions, in turn, determine what agreements we are likely to be living with. One way of perceiving reality focuses on possibility; another focuses on development, the processes of bringing new things into being; the third focuses on the things themselves – what currently exists. Each of these three perspectives tends to come with a distinctive sensation, which we can relate to as a familiar experience of a fundamental quality of the physical world: light (possibility); motion (development); and matter (things). In Chapter 2, I share stories of how people describe their experiences with these three levels of reality: the abundance and high vibrancy

that are available when all three are present; the medium abundance and vibrancy when the focus is on development-motion; and the scarcity and low vibrancy associated with perceiving only the things-matter level.

Since they are only perceptions of reality, not reality itself, all three of these aspects of reality are always present, whether or not we perceive them. In the same way, all five relationships contribute to our overall sense of well being whether we are paying attention to all of them or not. I will show you how we can combine the three levels of perceived reality with the five fundamental relationships, to create a map of the territory through which we must navigate our way to abundance and harmonic vibrancy. Then, we will consider different routes we may take through this terrain, each leading to different agreements and qualities of experience.

Chapter 3 examines the role of agreements in depth. It provides a bridge from looking at abundance in terms of our personal experience to a larger domain by showing that the basic principles developed so far apply to agreements at all levels. I will show you how this works with examples of interactions I have had with individuals, small groups like my family, a corporate leadership team and a school board, as well as large groups like government agencies, multi-national corporations and non-profits, and global networks. By the end of Part 1, you will have a working understanding of the core insight of Ecosynomics: we know abundance is possible because we have experienced it directly, and we know we prefer abundance to scarcity; yet we tend to experience more scarcity than abundance because, without thinking about it, we accept scarcity-producing agreements. The remainder of the book builds on this foundation to show you how to see the scarcity or abundance in existing agreements and how to move toward agreements of abundance and harmonic vibrancy.

Part 2 refines the experience-based framework from Part 1 with lenses that sharpen your understanding of agreements. Chapter 4 looks historically at the assumption of scarcity in economics and how four major streams of economic thought—the theories of resources and resource allocation, value theory, and organization theory—influence the agreements we see and those we enter every day. We also see how different interpretations of these four areas of thought have led to five very different economic systems around the globe in the past two hundred years. The chapter concludes by considering the paradoxical nature of economics. The paradox is this: all economic systems aim to deliver abundance yet cannot succeed because they start from an assumption of scarcity and premise all of their agreements on that assumption.

In Chapter 5, I suggest that the four main areas of economic thought might more usefully be conceived as four different lenses on experiences and agreements. To make this possible, I present a framework that integrates the four lenses with the five basic relationships (self, other, group, nature, and spirit) and three levels of perceived reality (possibility-light, development-motion, and things-matter). This seems like a lot of complexity, I know. However, in Chapter 6, it all comes together in a relatively simple tool, the Agreements Map. This tool makes it possible to see the agreements underlying our experience and the costs of scarcity in those agreements. The Agreements Map will also show you that you have choices to shift agreements to create higher-vibrancy experiences.