

Cradle To Cradle Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Cradle To Cradle* uncovers the hidden problems with manufacturing, how they affect our planet, and what you can do to help by becoming eco-efficient.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



The last time your shoes got a hole in them, did you just throw them away? What about when you dropped your phone and cracked the screen? Chances are, you just bought a newer one instead. And it's not really your fault. Often it's much easier and sometimes cheaper to just replace something rather than go to fix it.

Why? Because the things we buy are designed to get broken and replaced. Pretty much everything that is manufactured is destined to one day end up in the trash. Not just because they're poorly made, but many products we buy are just too hard to put safely back into the environment.

In *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, we learn that there are ways we can adjust the manufacturing industry to be both sustainable and more efficient. Authors William McDonough and Micheal Braungart use their expertise in chemistry and environmental science to show just how achievable it is.

Here are the 3 most interesting ideas about manufacturing from this book:

1. The way manufacturing is structured today is fundamentally bad for the environment.
2. The current way we regulate the environment isn't enough for the long haul.
3. Eco-effectiveness is better than eco-efficiency in protecting the environment.

Let's get right to it and see what we can do to help our planet!

Lesson 1: The structure of modern industrialism is inherently damaging to the environment.

During the Industrial Revolution, everyone wanted to produce things in the most efficient and profitable way possible. Most people believed that nature had a bottomless supply of resources for the taking. So naturally, as large-scale manufacturing exploded, little to no thought went into the environmental consequences.

We may be more aware of our environmental impact today, but it still remains a linear system. Meaning, the things we purchase go from producer to us and to the trash. **This way of production is known as the cradle-to-grave model. We get resources to make products, sell these, and they end up in a "grave," most likely the dump.**

Corporations also tend to design things using a one-size-fits-all-approach. An example of this can be found in laundry detergent in the US. Though many places like the Northwest have soft water so they only need small amounts of laundry detergent, soap manufacturers make only a strong detergent suitable for people with the hardest water. It might save money, but it's terrible for the environment.

We see this in many other examples like mining or clearing land for one crop. This way of thinking reflects our deep ideology that the earth just exists for our taking. Sure, we've made progress, but the authors argue that we haven't given the problem the effort it truly needs.

Lesson 2: What we are doing for the environment isn't enough if we want to be sustainable long-term.

You may have heard the 3 R's: "reduce, reuse, and recycle." It seems like a simple solution, right? Not exactly. The problem with reduction is that it doesn't halt damage to the environment, it just slows it down. Reusing isn't ideal either because it involves simply transferring a problem from one place to another.

Finally, the problem with recycling is that we lose the quality of the material over time, so it's really like downcycling. This is because we're not able to separate what we mixed in making the first product. Hence, the materials in products can't be brought back to what they first were.

Most of our eco-efficient ways are only fixing problems temporarily. **Though energy-efficient buildings have helped reduce the need for oil for heating and cooling by better insulation, poorly designed building materials actually add to indoor air pollution.** This means a need for more fresh air in buildings than before.

Surely the regulations that our government puts in place make sure corporations are doing their part, right? Unfortunately, the way they regulate isn't very helpful. Instead of encouraging businesses to try to create problem-solving, they resort to punishment if necessary, essentially making environmental protection just another hassle.

Lesson 3: Try eco-effectiveness instead of eco-efficiency to protect the world around us.

So what can we do? The authors suggest instead of trying to be efficient, look for ways to be *effective*. We can do this by making room for the cradle-to-cradle model. We need to change the way we see nature and focus on the best kind of products and systems.

Eco-effectiveness wants to help industries do the "right thing" and still be bigger and better. **We can do this by considering ways to bring manufactured materials back to nature safely, such as making products biodegradable.**

Usually, we take biological materials and turn them into technical materials, which can't be returned to nature in a usable way. But it's possible to design products as biological nutrients. One place we can do this is in soaps and other cleaners. If we did this, after they have washed away, they could safely end up in a wetland and support the ecosystem.

We could also designate materials as technical materials, that can go back into the technical cycle. One idea of how to do this is instead of selling a TV, businesses could rent it out for a time. When the customer was done, they could return it, and the same material can be recycled into a newer TV.

Business owners must adopt a fractal triangle of equity, economy, and ecology. Equity considers fairness, such as whether or not employees are treated fairly. Economy considers whether or not you will turn a profit. Ecology means considering whether or not you are creating too much waste or negatively impacting the environment. Your processes and products need to find a balance between all three aspects of this triangle.

Cradle To Cradle Review

Whoa, Cradle To Cradle is a really eye-opening book! I like that it dives into the complexity of the issues surrounding taking care of our planet instead of just assuming the age-old advice like recycling is perfect. I think if we combine ideas like these with small, actionable steps that each person can take, we'll be living on a healthier planet much faster!

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Who would I recommend the Cradle To Cradle summary to?

The 47-year-old business executive who is looking for ways to improve their business's impact on the environment, the 26-year-old who wants to start a manufacturing company but also would like to make sure to get off on the right foot, and anyone that wants to discover how they can help our planet.