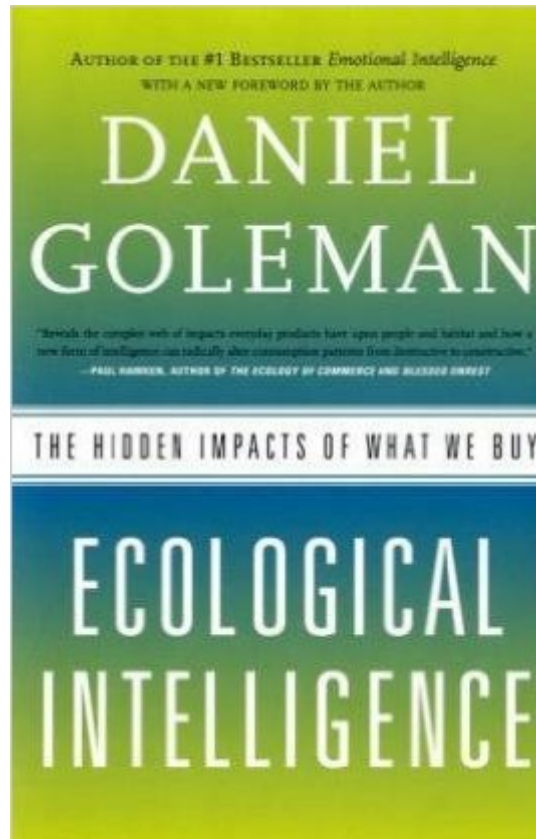


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Ecological Intelligence: The Hidden Impacts Of What We Buy



Synopsis

The bestselling author of Emotional Intelligence and Primal Leadership now brings us Ecological Intelligence—revealing the hidden environmental consequences of what we make and buy, and how with that knowledge we can drive the essential changes we all must make to save our planet and ourselves. We buy “herbal” shampoos that contain industrial chemicals that can threaten our health or contaminate the environment. We dive down to see coral reefs, not realizing that an ingredient in our sunscreen feeds a virus that kills the reef. We wear organic cotton t-shirts, but don’t know that its dyes may put factory workers at risk for leukemia. In Ecological Intelligence, Daniel Goleman reveals why so many of the products that are labeled green are a mirage, and illuminates our wild inconsistencies in response to the ecological crisis. Drawing on cutting-edge research, Goleman explains why we as shoppers are in the dark over the hidden impacts of the goods and services we make and consume, victims of a blackout of information about the detrimental effects of producing, shipping, packaging, distributing, and discarding the goods we buy. But the balance of power is about to shift from seller to buyer, as a new generation of technologies informs us of the ecological facts about products at the point of purchase. This “radical transparency” will enable consumers to make smarter purchasing decisions, and will drive companies to rethink and reform their businesses, ushering in, Goleman claims, a new age of competitive advantage.

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Customer Reviews

It's the ultimate detective work: examining the processes (including energy, chemicals, social impacts) involved with creating, transporting, storing and ultimately consuming and disposing of "stuff." Author Goleman digs deep into "life cycle analysis" (LCA) of a wide range of products, looking at the environmental and social ramifications that are usually "out of sight, out of mind," guided by expert Gregory Norris. The insights are illuminating and go far beyond the usual (casual) carbon calculation. The process of recycling glass alone-- and the energy and chemistry involved-- is a real eye-opener, reminding us that reducing our impact to CO2 emissions vastly oversimplifies our footprint on the planet. In my mind, this approach of telling stories and conducting forensic investigations into "stuff" should be embedded throughout education, because it is inherently interdisciplinary, combining math and science, but also social studies, history, psychology, business, sociology. It's also timely and would contribute to "eco-school" and 100% green school goals that are currently being developed. For business people, this book is a must. While the "greening" of business is nothing new and is all too often manifest as "green-washing," there are signs that business is taking "cradle to grave" analysis of products and the supply chain seriously, in part because regulation of embedded greenhouse gases will require careful accounting, in part because of increased social responsibility, and in part because, when done correctly, it can save money, reduce waste, and provide a competitive advantage over the competition. Goleman rightly points out that we can't consume our way out of the dire situation we are in, but we can reduce our consumption and buy smartly.

I am appreciative of Goleman's idea of highlighting different branches or domains of intelligence, which is why I purchased this book. However, ecological intelligence is the wrong title for this book because neither of these subject areas are covered. I am a practicing ecologist and I am working on a second masters degree in ecoliteracy education. I am also the primary author for the Wikipedia ecology page. Hence, this book seemed like a good place to turn for my research. This book is about changing market decisions that are considered to be more 'ecologically' ethical in Goleman's mind, but the problem is that the connections between the market choices and their ecological impacts are not clear at all. This book needs an introduction to ecology. For example, Goleman could have introduced some of the work by Howard Odum, a classical ecologist who ushered in a new era of understanding in the ecological sciences and wrote about the unification of ecology, economics and energy. Perhaps a historical account of the ecological sciences going back to Linnaeus or even Haeckel who first coined the word ecology. This would give some perspective on what ecology really means. Goleman needs to introduce and then build upon actual ecological

literature to make the correct linkages. There was lots of opportunity to visit some of the ideas of natural capitalism and ecosystem services as they relate to critically to ecological intelligence. He mentions these, but so briefly that the reader cannot leave with an understanding of what these subjects are really about. There is no mention of the research in environmental education looking at the psychological or affectual relations between learning and ecological immersion, which would have been a good place to start.

I have a mixed view of this book. Firstly, on a purely literary level, as with many business oriented books these days, there is one key idea, very easily grasped in the first chapter, with which you will agree or disagree. But there is very little real need to read on after that. Secondly, I absolutely agree with Goleman that consumers with good sustainability intentions either can't access the data they need to make an informed choice, or don't know how to assess the information they do have. In a perfect world, that information would be easily available to consumers, and they would be able to weight that information according to what matters to them - ie some might be especially concerned with the labour environment in which the product was produced, others might be more concerned with ecological impact etc. Thirdly I agree that in an era of "big data" this information is going to be coming easier to come by and there is an opportunity to present it to consumers in a variety of convenient ways - either through apps, QR codes, rating scales etc. Where I disagree with Goleman is that ipso facto this means that consumers will make better decisions. No. Some consumers will make better decisions about some product categories some of the time. The idea that all consumers are sufficiently involved in all categories to take the trouble to make informed decisions all the time is misguided. A mother may well take the trouble to make better decisions about the products' she buys' impact on her baby's health; but will she extend that to her husband's jeans, the cat's chow and the clothes she buys for herself? Probably not in most cases.

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