

This brief FAQ offers an introduction to some of the key concepts in feminist business and feminist entrepreneurship. For more detail, please see my book *Feminism: A Key Idea for Business* (Routledge, 2020) as well as my website <http://cvharquail.com>. Follow me on Twitter @cvharquail. Please email me at cv@feministsatwork.com with any questions or comments you'd like to share—I'd love to know how these ideas resonate with you.

Questions covered here:

- Q1: What are Feminist Businesses?
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Q1: What are Feminist Businesses?

Feminist Businesses use their products, their own organization, and their presence in their industry and community to *end* sexism and all kinds of oppression, to *establish* economic, social, and political equality of all people, and to *create* a world in which the planet and its inhabitants flourish.

Feminist Businesses create different forms of value – money as well as ideas, practices relationships, sense of community, emotional wellness, etc. -- through the work they do to make and sell things so that more value and more kinds of value can be distributed to everyone in ways that are fair.

Feminist Businesses provide life-affirming products and services to customers, just returns to investors, right livelihoods for employees and owners, and benefits to the community while advancing all of us towards flourishing. They do this through what they create and through the practices, systems, and structures through which they create.

Feminist Businesses works for everyone and they also work well.

Q2: What do Feminist Businesses do that's different from what other socially progressive businesses do?

Feminist Business Practices help us get to the root of almost every problem that besets conventional businesses today, because feminist business practices challenge the arrangements and assumptions of illegitimate power upon which conventional businesses are based. These illegitimate power arrangements are what cause business problems like lack of engagement, pollution, insufficient wages, and the prioritization of owners over workers, to name just a few.

Conventional assumptions about business lead us to accept a certain set of priorities and values that don't serve us all. They enable businesses to extract more value than they create and to damage society and the planet. Keep in mind that conventional businesses coordinate the work of a whole lot of people, to make and sell things, all to generate wealth for owners. That's what businesses do, and when they don't do that they go out of business. Either they close down or they become non-businesses (e.g., for profits, government agencies, foundations).

All the other things we hope for from businesses, such as providing life-sustaining wages, meaningful work, socially-responsible behavior, fabulous products, sustainability initiatives, etc. are side projects that are add-ons to the core purpose of producing wealth for owners. Wealthy companies will often support these other initiatives (especially when they believe there's a 'business case' to do so), but these are also the first things to go when profits slip or when owners seek a higher rate of financial return.

Now, looking at other progressive social movements -- All of these progressive social movements focus on the same basic truth: Business as it stands now works against too many of us for the benefit of too few of us. Whether the progressive movement advocates self-management, horizontal power sharing, sustainability and re-generativity, organizational democracy, localism, co-operativism, stakeholder models, or whatever, they don't address the fundamental idea that some group of people deserve to have power over others just because of who they are or what they own.

Most progressive business movements don't name illegitimate power or discuss how it gets created and sustained or consider how it should be transformed. They don't address gendered power structures, or white supremacy, or colonialism, or ableism, or other forms of oppression. Since they are not working to address oppressions, they are by definition allowing these oppressions to continue to drive our economic, social and political lives. When they lack a social justice perspective, otherwise progressive business movements fall short.

Q3. How does Feminist Business fit into this larger conversation of progressive organizational movements?

Feminist Business isn't the only conversation about making businesses work better or pushing to transform capitalism. Feminism sees the same truth, that business as it stands now works against too many of us for the benefit of too few of us. Feminists come at this truth from a broader conversation, one that's been informed by over two centuries of feminist analyses of power, the marketplace, leadership, and human potential. Feminist business leverages this body of work and the understanding it's given us.

At the same time, feminist business also draws on over two centuries of social justice practice to address sexism, racism, classism, and other oppressions. Feminists have learned how to organize, how to coordinate, how to co-create, how to lead, how to design, make and distribute products, how to pay people for their work, how to invest and renew their resources, how to manage their time and energies, how to bring forward their spirits and their souls to innovate, and especially how to influence other people to join in the movement towards equality, justice and flourishing. And feminist business practices do all of this without relying on threat of harm, threat of losing one's livelihood, triggering people's fears of insufficiency, or other forms of inherent violence against workers and contributors.

Each progressive movement starts from a specific position, with a specific concern, and it's limited (and enabled) by how it defines the problems business has. For example, sustainability advocates worry about the planet's health, and they emphasize treatment of the natural environment. Organizational democracy advocates worry about how decisions are made and how wealth is distributed, and so they look at decision making processes and rights. All of these movements are doing something important to change the world of business, and we are all working towards the same overall goal—business (or economic activity) that works well for all of us.

Interestingly, we in the entrepreneurial feminist community have discovered as we've collaborated with other progressive business movements that we are able to influence each other to include each other's perspectives and concerns more intentionally. For example, we got advice on the Feminist Business Model Canvas from the Flourishing Enterprise group (lean4flourishing.biz) that has its own canvas and process that begin with (environmental) sustainability and lean process design. They have expanded their analysis to include social sustainability (aka social justice) while we have made sure that the Feminist Business Model Canvas workshops include a discussion of the additional and complementary insights feminist founders can discover using the Flourishing Enterprise canvas.

Q4: What are Feminist Business Practices?

Feminist business practices work to transform the systems of business, work, and economics by infusing everyday business actions with feminist values and pointing them towards feminist goals.

Feminist business practices challenge the automatic acceptance of values, priorities, and behaviors that don't serve all of us and experiment with values, priorities, and behaviors that serve more of us more fairly.

Feminist business practices can be found in any domain of business practice, and they are always specific to the work people are doing, the people doing the work, and the particular goals of the collective coordinating the work. Thus, a list of feminist business practices could be endless.

That said, feminist business practices are unified by one meta-level feature. They all challenge oppressive power relationships and aim to transform them into consensual, collective power relationships. Feminist business practices can be inspired by answering three questions:

- Who does this business practice / decision/ situation serve?
- Who does this business practice/ decision/ situation not serve? Who is harmed by it?
- Are we okay with this? If not, what can we do differently?

Feminist Business Practices are intentional efforts to rethink how we do business.

Feminist Business Practices evolve from individual reflection and group discussion about what priorities and values the business intends to demonstrate and pursue. Founders, leaders, and members of feminist businesses have the agency to question, reflect on and experiment with not only why they are doing certain things but also how they are doing them. They can continue to ask these questions and revise their practices to get better as businesses and as business members.

Feminist Business practices are transformational but not necessarily revolutionary. These practices are not going to overthrow capitalism tomorrow although they make meaningful differences right away.

Feminist business practices are intended to make meaningful differences yet incremental changes within capitalism. Because they are a hybrid of conventional business practices and feminist values, they work within and point themselves at the constraints of conventional ways of doing business.

For example, Feminist Businesses might still distribute a larger return to investors than to employee-owners because even values-aligned investors will only loan money on terms profitable to them. These profits and expectations may be less than what lenders would demand from a conventional company, but they still have to feel worthwhile to the owners/lenders of this capital. Thus, where a revolutionary practice might be to loan money interest-free (as SheEO does with its ventures), other values-led investors might loan money at a 6% rate to feminist businesses instead of a 20% rate they expect from conventional startups.

Q5. What is Entrepreneurial Feminism?

First identified by entrepreneurship scholars Barbara Orser and Catherine Elliot (Feminine Capitol, 2018), entrepreneurial feminism has evolved into a mindset and portfolio of strategies for building enterprises (businesses & ventures) that transform the world by putting feminist values into everyday business practice.

Q6: What is a Feminist Business Model?

A Feminist Business Model describes how a company creates, delivers, and captures not just financial value but also myriad other forms of economic, political, social, and relational value, by demonstrating feminist values, while sustaining itself and its members, while changing the world.

In contrast, a conventional business model describes how a company creates, delivers, and captures financial revenue.

Q7: What is the Feminist Business Model Canvas?

The Feminist Business Model Canvas™ (FBMC) is a tool and a working process designed to help feminists and other activist businesspeople build feminist organizations and make existing organizations more feminist. More generally, it helps folks build their social change agenda and values into their business activities.

The FBMC includes several sections (or boxes) found in more conventional business models, such as the Osterwalder, Pigneur, et al. (2010) Business Model Canvas, and Ash Maurya's Running Lean Canvas (2010). It includes a few sections unique to Feminist businesses, as well as unique details and interpretations of conventional business elements.

The FBMC has seven units — Purpose, Company Capabilities, Customers, Customer Needs, Products, Structure, and Outcomes— that organize the 16 specific sections.

The Feminist Business Model Canvas diverges from conventional business models and from the popular, conventional Business Model Canvas of Osterwalder, Pigneur, et al., in five main ways:

The first is by **the choice of sections and subsections** that should be part of a business model canvas. Several sections (and their related questions) are unique to the FBMC: Collective Values, Foundational Strengths, Values Streams, Simple Theory of Change, and the Vision-Mission-Purpose.

In addition, several of the subsections that give these concepts important texture, such as noting Human Costs, recognizing Social Stakeholders, highlighting functional as well as expressive needs & product features, and tracking social change outcomes, are all unique to the Feminist Business Model Canvas™.

Second, the FBMC **leads with a business's strengths**, values, and core capabilities. All other elements draw from this foundational knowledge about the company or team and its collective resources. This 'strengths-first' approach reflects the feminist belief that collectively we have the resources we need to make something useful for the world.

Third, the FBMC diverges from conventional models and canvases through **the sets of questions** that accompany each segment of the canvas. These specific, explicit questions guide users towards richer, more clarified business model elements and invites them to be more innovative in how they understand what they're looking for.

Conventional business model canvases use just one or two questions because it's assumed that everyone shares the same business-as-usual expectations of what needs to be understood about products, or customers, or costs, etc.

Fourth, the FBMC diverges from conventional business models and canvases by **bringing into focus some specific feminist values** and deliberately asking how the business itself can demonstrate and respond to these values through its business model design.

Finally, the FBMC follows a multi-step, iterative group process designed to draw insights from all startup team members and develop collective understanding and commitment. For many teams, the process (*how*) of working through the FBMC adds more value than the produce (*what*) of a template filled out with words.

For more information about the FBMC and to download a free overview, please see <http://www.feministsatwork.com/tools-ebooks/fbmc-free-download/>