

OUR TRANSFORMATION TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE : BUSINESS AND PERSONAL

This series of three short articles will briefly describe 3 periods of challenging transformation to a sustainable future for the majority of readers, especially in these difficult times in which we live. These articles are meant to provide serious food for thought, as well as some initial assistance both at the personal level and the business level. They consider the serious depths of change needed in these next steps to positively transform our personal and working lives. This is a complete rethinking, in many cases, of what we have been taught over many years, especially at a time when even rich countries have no valid answers or solutions. We need to develop a new model that is in tune with Mexican culture and conditions.

The three articles are called:

1. Deep Roots of Our Crisis
 2. Deep Values and Principles as the Foundation for Future Sustainability
 3. Initial steps to put “new thinking” to work : Practicing “La Conciencia Sustentable”
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DEEP ROOTS OF OUR PRESENT CRISIS

The present crisis is considered , by international researchers and visionaries as the worst crisis in living memory, and thus requires a deep and different approach in solving it.

The reasons for the seriousness of the crisis are many, but all seem to be associated with the actions of we humans. The most important causes of the crisis can be summarized:

1. Worship of economic related values as top priority in life and the search for happiness. This has been done at the expense of human and ecological necessities, even in countries with large poor populations.
2. Earth is viewed as an “Economic whole” around which we need to manage and accommodate ecological and social challenges-----instead of viewing the Earth as an “ecological whole” around

which we need to manage and accommodate economic needs. That is , if we destroy or seriously weaken the ecological services which Nature provide for free (like air to breathe, potable water and clean land to grow food--- all needed for life itself) then the economic priority has no meaning. As a result of this we are experiencing massive social problems, including increased poverty, violence and refugees (within and outside countries).

3. Ecological Breakdown: For the first time in human history we are seeing serious and deep ecological breakdown and non-reversible transformations that most scientists now agree are mainly the result of human behavior. Governments and businesses are experiencing a new reality.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN ?

Many thoughtful researchers around the world now feel that Classical (and neoclassical) Economics has become King and the Business world which depends on its principles has become the ruler. We have been taught that Money is King and human happiness depends on Money, and governments in many countries have become subject to the wishes of huge business interests(both nationally and internationally) when decisions are made which affect the whole population.

All human and ecological matters are considered “externalities” to be “managed” to promote “economic growth” at all costs. This situation has now reached its limits and we see breakdowns around us in all 3 major areas: economic(worldwide meltdown), serious ecological breakdown (climate change), and Social breakdown (violence and dislocation of huge populations).

An example of this can be considered NAFTA. Here we have an agreement amongst 3 very different countries with different interests. It has benefited a number of business interests in all of these countries and is considered by many to be a success story.

Let us look a bit closer in the light of our global crisis. Firstly, this agreement was perceived as basically a commercial agreement. Later on in the negotiation it became clear that a concern was shown related to environmental issues as well as labour issues. Finally these 2 additional considerations was placed as an “addition” to the main agreement. They were not included in the main body of the agreement, and thus do not carry the weight of the commercial aspects in the agreement, and only considered of secondary importance.

We can now see, following several years of experience, that as a commercial agreement NAFTA has been positive for a number of companies. However, considering the total populations of the countries, the importance of ecological and social factors need to have a weighting quite different from the present. This is an example where the economic has been considered King and ecological and social take

a lower priority -----with the now obvious results for all 3 countries, each being affected in different ways. This also confirms the danger we have in considering Economic aspects as King.

WHERE DID WE ALL GO WRONG?

Based on the views of visionaries in these fields, we have basically elevated some to the most negative of human attributes to “priority” status, while at the same time discounting some deeply seated positive values, which link us directly to (and dependent) to each other and the whole ecological world on which all humanity finally depends.

According to some thoughtful and highly respected economists , the Values which have been created, over several decades, which have led to these distortions in society are: GREED and FEAR.

These human values have linked prosperity and human happiness directly with conventional neo-classical economic theory , and delinked the key role of ecology and social welfare. It sees Economics as a pure science , and based on unquestionable truths. No one seems to have questioned this until now. Economic growth has become the “mantra” for human progress and happiness for decades. And now ----many of the basic principles and values on which this form of Economics is seated , is being questioned.

(For those readers interested, please refer to the controversy related to the Nobel prize for economics, as well as the work being done by David Loye related to the work of Darwin which has been uncovered).

We are now in TRANSITION.

The old thinking is being increasingly discredited, but we as yet have no “magic bullet” with which to replace it.

We need to begin this process by looking at ourselves as humans, who have created this situation and understand our own deeply seated values. Then we need to understand the linkage between these values and the policies and practices which result , thus leading us to our present situation.

Let us be clear: no one, even in the rich northern countries have a clear idea of what to do. We are in new territory. At present, governments are struggling to prop up the old “debt based” system to avoid an even more serious collapse. So the mantra continues : “keep buying and borrowing”; on the other

side we are told : “be prudent, and only buy what you absolutely need, and take serious measure to reduce you debt load” .

For the majority poor it means simply the need to avoid starvation for their families. As always in these situations, the poor are the hardest hit in every country.

Where do we go from here -----signs of hope

In terms of where to begin ,it is appearing clearer every day that people themselves in their own communities are beginning to act.

In these communities we need to study: a) What has gone well in the past? B) What has gone badly? And why.

Here is a key it seems: We are beginning to study the deep values which result in policies and practices that have positive outcomes.

At the community level, everyone participates, as everyone has something to offer, and is needed.

These lessons learned appear to also affect a number of people having the interest and energy to transfer this learning to their work. The largest part of these appear to be the smaller business sector, who in turn, begin to affect larger businesses in a positive way.

Speaking of communities and work, it also appears more clearly understood now , that the future will be moving more and more towards the “human scale.”

This has been known for many regions and countries for a long time, but in recent times almost disappearing with the advent of “bigger is better”, especially related to international trade. This does not mean that international trade will disappear, but based on studies of researchers in this field there are indicators that international trade will take different forms, and on a much smaller scale than at present. If this is true, it means that communities, regions and countries will begin to have more control over the focus of their OWN development. This would also take into account serious responsibilities in ecological and social aspects of the development in any area.

To begin the process of assessing where we are now in our community or business, probably one of the first things we need to know is where we are now,

What are the present beliefs or values?

To assist in this process it may be useful to “compose” a brief “profile” of a person who is a “conventional thinker” with conventional values, and then compare this to a brief “profile” of a person who is a “sustainable thinker” (someone involved in practices and thinking which have resulted in positive outcomes for most ecological, social and economic aspects.)

The next article will provide these profiles, together with an outline of what we are now learning about some universally held positive values that we as humans all possess, but maybe have been hidden or forgotten for many years. These values will then be used as a foundation for new policies and practices for a sustainable organization.