SUSTAINABLE THINKING AND PRACTICE

This is the third of a group of 3 articles related to the deep sustainable leadership challenges we presently face in organizations .
The first of the previous 2 articles outlined the roots of our crisis, and the second article outlined the deeply held universal values which form the foundation of our principles and values.

This article outlines some important practical principles which can form the basis for genuine sustainable organizational planning, policy development and actions.

For simplification, a direct comparison is shown between "conventional principles" in most organizations on the one side, compared to "sustainable principles " on the other side. These principles are arranged with personal principles coming first, followed by organizational principles. Following the comparative table a brief description of each principle is provided. Application of these principles in organizational planning and policy can begin immediately for all leaders who believe in genuine sustainability values . Please note that the principles outlined are all related to deeply rooted universal values outlined in Article #2.

In our move towards a sustainable future, there are appearing indications, that the transformation of organizational principles will lead to new policies and practices for sustainable leadership and organizational governance for a successful future.

NOTE: The conventional "business as usual " principles no longer seem to work. A new and rethought foundation of principles and values appear to be essential for successful organizations for the future.

Comparison chart: towards Sustainability

Conventional Principles   Sustainable Principles

1.Strong Individualism------------------------ The common good.
2.Strong personal ego--------------------------Personal Humility.
3.Avoid blame for mistakes------------------- Take responsibility for mistakes.
4.Win/Lose---Win/Win.
5.Vision/Planning – short term-----------------Vision/Planning – long term.
6.Linear Thinking-----------------------------------Integrated thinking.
7.Economic priority------------------------------- Balanced priorities
        (all others externalities)   (ecologica/social/economic)

DESCRIPTION OF COMPARISON PRINCIPLES

   1. Strong Individualism
Conventionally we have assumed the importance of strong individualism as necessary for economic and social success. It is assumed that humans are interested first and foremost in themselves , no matter how this may affect others. Our society encourages strong individualism and pride as positive human characteristics for making money and the power and status that goes with it.

The Common Good
Organizations with sustainable principles completely transform conventional principles. Organizational leaders become principally developers of sustainable thinking people , and organizations directed towards the "common good". Society admires them for their vision, social and ecological sensitivities, and leadership abilities. This leadership involves "service" to the organization and community . Leaders know that success depends on the development of their own people, as well as taking seriously the needs of all stakeholders .(including ecological , social and economic). Here lies the essence of "common good."

2. Strong Personal Ego
These principles place a high value on strong individual egos. Strong egos are usually considered important for personal success. Ego enhancement comes through financial gain, power and status. These 3 personal attributes are supposed to deliver human happiness for all.Lack of a strong ego is usually viewed as a weakness which needs to change, and society usually associates success stories with strong personal egos.

Personal Humility
Sustainability principles require humility as a strong characteristic which provides an important basis for success. Fulfillment in work and life comes through genuine leadership (helping, training and guiding others)success at all levels. Leaders as well need to understand the "big picture" and how the organization fits into total Earth needs.

In sustainable organizations (and individuals) it is considered:
A HUMBLE PERSON IS OPEN TO NEW AND DIFFERENT IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES, AND CONTINUES TO LEARN EVERY DAY. ON THE CONTRARY ,A PERSON WITH A STRONG EGO USUALLY FEELS HE/SHE KNOWS BEST AND OFTEN STOPS LEARNING.

3. Avoid blame for mistakes
Conventionally, within an organization most people will be very cautious when something goes wrong in their work situation. Many, as a cautionary measure often try to divert responsibility to something (or someone) outside their control . Often a great deal of effort and time is expended to push the responsibility for a mistake towards something or someone else outside their group. Traditionally mistakes could result in an individual losing his/her job, as well as being viewed as a disgrace in the society. Hence the acceptance of responsibilities for the consequences of one's action has been slow to develop.

Accept Personal responsibility for mistakes
In sustainable organizations the concept of acceptance of responsibility for one's actions is totally overturned. At every level, there is extensive participation and pride involving all employees, and they feel a sense of personal responsibility for any mistakes made in their area. This sense of responsibility is fostered by an approach to management which encourages input and involvement from all employees and ensures employees that we learn from our mistakes and as a result can become more valuable employees and managers (the opposite of a disgrace). Also this is reinforced by moving the decision making process to the lowest possible levels in the organization.

4. Win/Lose

Conventional principles are based on the importance of win/lose realities in a competitive environment. This means that it is accepted that a few will win and many will lose ---but this is life, and should provide motivation for losers to try harder for the next opportunity to win.
The basis of these principles are clearly visible in the current economic crisis------where a very few were extremely successful economically, while the majority are suffering huge losses.
These losses are not only economic, but also ecological and social , which threatens the development of many regions and countries worldwide.

Win/Win

These principles, on the contrary, provide a basis for everyone to benefit. This means the people win in many different ways, as each organization or individual looks through an "integrated' lens in planning (which is long term), and the responsibility is to provide a balanced ecological, social and economic approach to all winning.
Fulfillment in life and work satisfaction concepts are winning concepts, and priorities are geared to taking into account the "whole" long term picture when assessing sustainable winnings

5.Vision and Planning –short term

Most organizations are presently highly pressured to show short term profitability. As a result all planning is focused on short term economic results, without consideration for the consequences of this planning in social or ecological terms locally or globally.

Vision and Planning – long term

Long term vision and planning completely transforms the present organizational process.
A vision of the organization's existence for the long term requires leadership which understands the "big picture" of our world. This includes the limitations which Nature places on organizations ,the social consequences (well being of people) and the economic realities (viability of a product or service n the long term).

6. Linear Thinking

We have been taught that reliable logical and analytical thinking requires intelligent linear thinking (straight line – cause and effect) in organizations. This is often referred to as unipolar. That is, the business of business is to make money (for the organization and its shareholders). Leaders in organizations believing in this principle have contributed to the our present day crisis.

Integral Thinking

A fresh look at our unipolar approach has shown that we all need to take into account the new realities of the Earth limitations . We absolutely need to plan in an integral (many faceted) way, taking seriously the dominant ecological and social realities in which we live.
Everything appears interconnected and we cannot continue to think of only one facet of organizational responsibility. We cannot "divide and conquer", because we see more clearly every day that NATURE WILL FINALLY WIN.

7. The Economic Priority
 In agreement with linear thinking, leaders are accustomed to using economic aspects as the priority.
 For all organizational planning, this means that little consideration is given to consequences of these plans. However, it is common for most to feel that as the economic aspect is the priority, any costs involved in consequences for which the organization is responsible , can be covered through their economic gains. Other longer term consequences in ecological or social areas are considered the responsibility of some other entity , often governments. The conviction is strongly focused on only one priority ----economic as the sole responsibility of especially business organizations.

 Balanced Priorities: Ecological/Social/Economic
The responsibilities of sustainable organizations in society have expanded dramatically , from purely economic priorities to a clearly balanced responsibility ---ecological, social and economic. As a result, this worldview related to organizations has transformed our way of thinking: from seeing the world as an "economic whole" and ecological and social issues needing to fit in around the economic limitations and needs , TOWARDS,   a world as basically an ecological whole, and economic needs are restricted by the realities of Nature's services.
 Nature is now King.

In summary, for readers who would like to begin their process of moving towards genuine sustainability , attempting to superimpose sustainable principles on the conventional foundation principles has proven disappointing . We need to accept ,both personally and organizationally that a rethinking of what sustainable principles and values really mean appears essential for success.

WELCOME TO THIS NEW WORLD FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.!