

Introduction

This article is a call for action. It looks at some of the key trends emerging on planet Earth at the beginning of the 21st Century, what these trends mean for sustainable business, and the new breed of leadership that will be required for leading and governing organizations in the coming era. The concept of “wholesomeness” is discussed and its implications for leadership and sustainable business are brought out.

The only thing permanent in our long human journey is change. We are presently bombarded with news of the impacts of the information technology revolution, globalization, deregulation, e-commerce, mergers and take-overs, not to mention global climatic change and the rising disparity between income groups.

The changes that we are seeing right now can broadly be classified into two categories:

1. Positive or Evolutionary Trends, and
2. Negative or Regressive Trends

The purpose of this classification is not to create a framework for judgement, but to discuss the processes that we will have to respond to as leaders in business. The negative trends have been well documented elsewhere. (See for example: Adversity Trends in "The 2020 Challenge: Evolutionary Bounce or Evolutionary Crash?" By Duane Elgin at http://www.newhorizons.org/pn_elgin2020g.html)

At the same time, there are also many positive trends which point towards the rising of a new dawn on planet Earth. - To quote John Renesch "Social researcher Paul Ray discovered that over 44 million people in the U.S. alone now subscribe to new values and ways of relating to each other, the environment, success and spirituality. These findings were first published in 1994 and the numbers were still growing. This suggests a global trend toward - as well as a growing receptivity for - new values and priorities for business. "(The 21st Century Agenda for Business – John Renesch) at www.renesch.com/THE_-AGENDA/agenda1.html)

Business as a Major Force for Change

Business is one of the most powerful institutions on Earth. It has the potential to assume a creative and responsible role in the transformation of society for the well being of all. A change in the condition of planet Earth as a whole needs to, and can easily be catalyzed through the global business community where a spiritual renaissance is already unfolding.

Many business leaders are speaking of "expanding consciousness" in organizations, manifesting in processes like:

- Valuing interconnectedness
- Stewardship of resources,
- Creating joyful workplaces,
- Working from compassion, and
- Actively showing concern for the global ecology.

Business can play a very major role in co-creating: "A world in which the global business community serves society in ways that are life-affirming, sustainable, humanistic and responsible for positively influencing the future evolution of humanity." (Renesch)

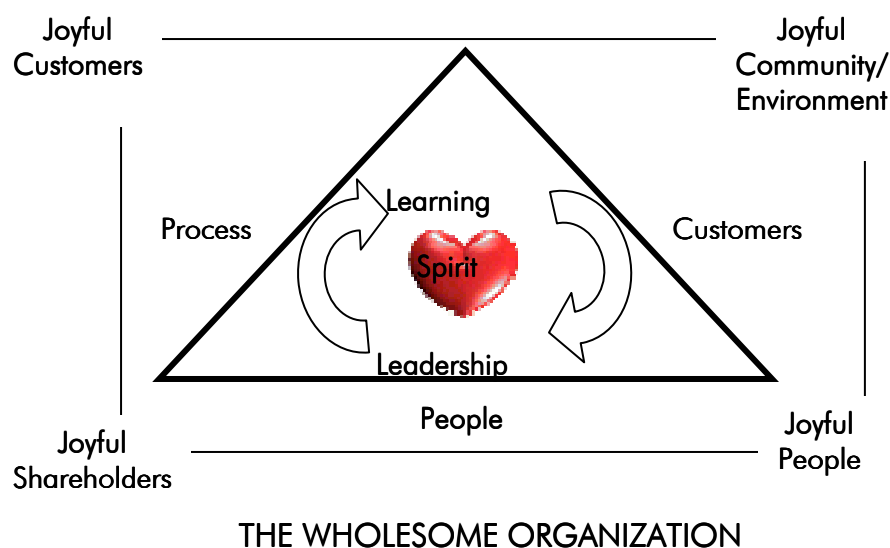
Sustainable Business

One of the challenges for business leaders is to work towards sustainable business. Sustainability of a business has three dimensions:

1. Ecological i.e. doing business in a manner that ensures a life affirming and continuously positive future for coming generations, with sustainable use of resources and minimal negative impact on the environment;
2. Sustainability of the Business in the Industry / Business Environment. This refers to the on-going learning and strategic adaptation of the business in its own economic environment in relation to its customers and their needs; and
3. Sustainability of individuals in the organizations: Since all of business is finally about people working together, the very continuance of an organization depends upon people staying together in the pursuit of a common vision, in a way that is spiritually and materially satisfying.

Let us briefly look at these three dimensions of sustainable business.

1. If the people in India and China start consuming like the average citizen of USA, we will need seven planet Earths to carry the environmental impact of this consumption! The Earth simply cannot sustain 6 billion or more people striving hard to emulate the American/Western way of life. Business will need to ask itself if the products and services that it is creating and selling are contributing towards an environmentally sustainable future for planet Earth.
2. Between 1975 to 1995, India's GDP doubled. The vehicular pollution however went up 4 to 8 times. Incidentally, sustainable business for a sustainable planet is a huge multiple trillion dollar opportunity which could generate "the most immense expansion of business opportunity in history" - (Duane Elgin, see above.) It is now time, more than ever before, to think about well-being and sustenance in terms of the whole world.
3. The most important resource for businesses in the future will be intellectual capital. The sustenance of such businesses in its own business environment will therefore require the organization to learn continuously. It will need to become and remain a learning organization, in which people are constantly finding new ways to add value and to serve customers. This will require an expansion of Insight, Innovation, Inspiration and Integration. People will need to joyfully work together to produce high quality and measurable results towards, what we call the Wholesome Organization, in our work at Pragati*.



4. For people to continuously contribute towards such organizations' goals, there must be an alignment of the values and vision they hold and the values and vision of the organization. People view the good life as a balanced life that includes meaningful participation in community, work that serves other people, quality time with family and opportunities for learning and creative expression. Above all, the work they do needs to be meaningful (with a purpose beyond just earning money) and in harmony with their talents and interests. More and more people would like their workplace to be more like a community and extended family in which harmonious and loving relationships are a way of life. The business leader of the future would have to facilitate the co-creation of such workplaces.

What Kind Of Leaders Do We Need To Create And Run Such Wholesome Sustainable Business Organizations Of The Future?

Let us attempt to put together a list of characteristics from a recent literature survey.

- The leader needs to be excellent in the skills of
 - Thinking,
 - Learning, and
 - Communicating.

The leaders of the future will have to be outstanding in empathic listening (especially to feelings). S/he must be able to engage in deep dialogue without getting stuck. This will call for an exceptionally open mind and also the ability to zoom in from a large global perspective to nitty-gritty details in the immediate here and now. S/he needs to have a high degree of mental flexibility and sensitivity to different cultures. Above all, s/he would need to have the humility to understand that true knowledge is in an unbounded sky of knowing, in which one is always wondering and curious, and never arrives.

- S/he needs to see the whole universe as an alive and interconnected organism, and also be conscious of the spiritual and aesthetic dimension of the human journey. Another dimension of a large perspective is to look at all aspects of business, and have a truly global perspective.
- Related to the above is the capacity to heal oneself and others. The leader of the future will help to heal herself and others through loving service.

- The leader will need to persuade and inspire others in the pursuit of common goals. S/he will need to mobilize energy through sharing a vision and building consensus. S/he will also need to be a person who encourages the heart and generates positive emotions.
- Leaders of the future will need to be committed to the development and growth of people. They will recognize that people need to grow materially, personally, professionally and spiritually as part of their own evolution. They will see the workplace as a “worth place” in which people are unfolding their full potential. They will remember that the need for expressing and receiving love is perhaps the most fundamental drive in human nature.
- They will therefore, also be builders of community who foster a viable life together for many people working within the same shared values and for a common vision of life.
- Such leaders will need to come from a space of integrity. They will need to be aligned with the deepest truth which is the core of life, and act from that space of love and freedom. They will need to recognize that the institutions and resources that come their way are held in trust for serving other people and the larger goals of life.
- They need to be channels of divine energy who "comfort the disturbed, and disturb the comfortable". While being centered in a space of inner tranquility and freedom, they must be able to question perceptions, mind-sets, processes, assumptions, and belief structures that have outlived their utility. They will constantly challenge the prevailing paradigms which are leading the world towards a major crisis, and will also proactively create a future that will take the world to its next evolutionary stage.
- This will require the leaders to have an enormous amount of self-confidence, faith and courage. They must have the faith to stand steady in the pursuit of this vision even if at times they have to walk alone.

From the above list, it looks like the new leader of the 21st century has to be like supergirl or superman! Few leaders will have all the characteristics that are needed to create and maintain sustainable businesses in the future. However, there is hope. Together people can muster up the characteristics, wisdom, inspiration and creative energy required to take on the challenges of a globally sustainable future for planet Earth.

The Need for Spirit

This will call for people to be inspired by spirit, and awakened to their own spiritual resources by people who, in turn, are awake themselves. The very heart of good leadership, of the kind we need in the coming years, will be a clear understanding of, and being open to, spirit.

Spirit is unbounded, undefined, immeasurable and timeless. It is the complete and whole totality we call Existence. Remen (93, p.41) sees spirit as non-seperative "A deep sense of the spiritual leads one to trust not one's own lonely power but the great flow or pattern manifested in all life, including our own. We become not manipulators but witnesses." Bradbery and Davies (1999, p.57) identify the essence of spirituality as "an awareness of human interconnectedness with each other and with their environment as an experience of unity or wholeness." As we see it, spirit is = the whole. Everything valuable known to man is related to wholeness and spirit. In fact, health is nothing but our original state of wholeness or unbroken, undivided spirit. All of life is a continuum from the external gross elements to the innermost essence of being. Everything is spirit and is one. However, we tend to think of spirit as only the essence. We forget that all this is divine consciousness. If this connection and wholeness are recognized, then life is harmonious, whole, balanced and healthy. If the connection or wholeness is lost, then life becomes unbalanced, and unhealthy.

Moving business towards a greater balance, health and global sustainability will call for wholesome leadership.

What is Wholesomeness?

Wholesomeness is unfolded spirit in its Totality. Wholesomeness is being Whole. It is the Totality, the Truth, the very ALL that is Allah, that is Brahman. It is recognizing that LOVE is Truth, is Reality and is the very core of Ease and Freedom. It is Freedom from ignorance and a partial understanding of life. It is liberation from the narrow confines of religiosity & sophistry. It is the leaving behind of limited theories, intellectualizations and arguments held up by the mind. In fact, it is letting go of the mind with love in the heart and remembering that the mind too has its own role in the whole scheme of things.

Wholesomeness means living in peaceful surrender and one-ness with life . . . a feeling of deep acceptance, gratitude and rest. It is not running away from anything, nor running after anything, because it is abundance and fullness right now. It is seeing the spiritual side of life as being one with the temporal, and of the material and inner dimensions being supportive

and complementary to each other. It means being en-theos . . . enthused & spirited as life is meant to be.

Wholesomeness simply is being whole. It means being free to respond to a situation appropriately. It unfolds oneness, and is about freely balancing between two or more opposing polarities. It means not responding in a conditioned, limited or partial way arising out of a limited and partial perception of situations, but responding from free awareness in the Now. It means operating free of habits and mind traps in a masterful way.

The mind has a tendency to get caught up in categories. Accordingly, the logical mind would say that, if one thing is good, its opposite must be bad. But life (and organizations!) do not work that way! Wholesomeness is dynamic balancing. It is the ability/freedom/flexibility to balance appropriately between different polarities e.g.:

• Left hemisphere thinking (Analytical, logical, linear)	and	• Right hemisphere thinking (Imaginative, unpatterned, creative)
• Task focus, output focus	and	• Relationship focus, feeling & process focus
• Giving feedback and being assertive	and	• Receiving feedback and Listening Sensitively
• Activity	and	• Rest
• Forcing, Doing, Planning	and	• Flowing, Allowing, Trusting
• Being Firm	and	• Being Yielding
• Action	and	• Reflection and Thinking

If these polarities were drawn as the two ends of the spokes of a wheel (as in the diagramme below), a wholesome style would be represented like the one on the left. It represents a person's behaviour freely moving between all polarities i.e. not getting stuck anywhere and dynamically balancing in each situation.

Wholesome Leadership

Wholesome Leadership is one in which the leader is aligned with spirit. S/he is one with the Real Self and is, therefore, completely free.

Many of the characteristics discussed in the earlier section will spontaneously manifest when the leader operates from spirit or pure awareness. S/he uses the mind, but does so grounded in no-mind. S/he acts, but from a mysterious space of non-doing. S/he becomes

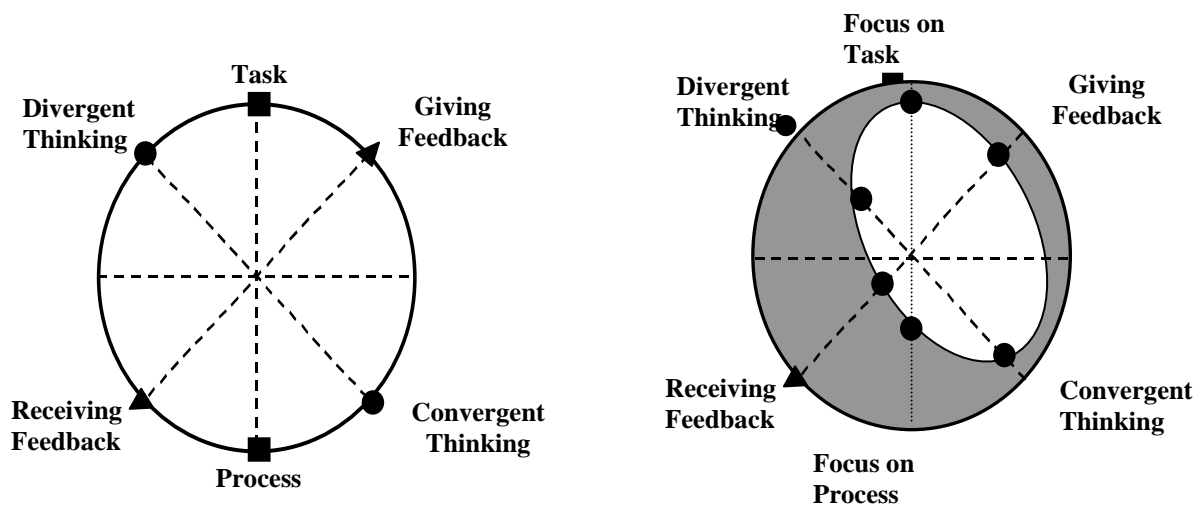
an agent of Existence who spontaneously facilitates the unfolding of love, peace, prosperity and abundance in his or her own life, and in other people.

Being free from identification with the ego, s/he freely draws upon the talents and resources of other people in a boundaryless manner. Being completely full inside, s/he is inspired by this fullness, and not driven by a sense of lack or deficiency.

Here is a small example to further illustrate the concept of Wholesome Leadership in a simplified manner:

Leadership behaviour can be looked at through three lenses of polarity:

- Focus on Task Vs. Focus on People
- Convergent or Analytical Thinking Vs. Use of Divergent or Creative Thinking, and
- Openness to Giving Feedback Vs. Openness to Receiving Feedback.



The diagramme at left represents a wholesome style of Leadership . . . one, which is Total, Spirited and Balanced. The one on the right represents an unwholesome style.

My own experience with many leaders, whom I have met in Business Organizations all over the world, shows that they tend to be pre-disposed towards the Task, Convergent Thinking and Giving Feedback parts of the whole. This unbalanced way of working (which is shown in the figure at right) leads to uneasiness & stress. There is a loss of joy, playfulness, health and results.

By now, you would have got a feel of the paradoxical nature of Wholesome Leadership. At one level, the wholesome leader is completely empty inside. There is a profound sense of peace and nothingness at the core, as also a deep sense of love and compassion. At the same time, there is intense action. Both these co-exist in a mysterious dance! The wholesome leader is like an empty flute through which Existence is playing her tunes. There is a dynamic balancing between different polarities, including a firm imbalance sometimes if it is required to restore a system to its overall balance!

Wholesome leaders are one with life and, in fact, are actually a force of life. They are loving in both a tender and a tough way. If they had a prayer, it would be the same as Paramhansa Yogananda's:

"Heavenly Father, I am no longer surrounded by barriers of 'I can't.' I have within me Thy great explosive power of 'I can!' Lord, bless me that I develop that power, so that I may destroy all my barriers and expand my territory beyond the limitations of my existence until I conquer the forces of this earth and of Thy cosmos by being one with Thee "

Conclusion

The challenge of leading sustainable business and developing leaders who can do this is an exciting one for those of us working for sustaining business success in the future. The challenge is also a very big opportunity. By developing wholesome leaders, we are preparing the ground for a global transformation, led by business, of mind-boggling proportions. This is because business can be a powerful force for global and sustainable well being.

This challenge will call for a wave of understanding generated all over the world, and action inspired by the Divine I AM. It will call for courageous action towards peace, prosperity and unconditional joy for all. . . . now and well into the future.

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