

The Rise and Fall of Growth: The Inappropriateness of Continuous Unchecked Growth

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Abstract

This paper explores education and advertising and its effect on how our worldview has been formed about the importance of growth regardless if the growth is appropriate or inappropriate. The paper suggests that unchecked inappropriate growth is a result of a 'global anxiety disorder' that sees growth as the measurement of human success. The paper further suggests that futures theory and methodology may be able to 'treat' inappropriate growth, as a worldview anxiety disorder, in much the same way that psychotherapy treats anxiety disorders.

If economic fundamentalism and its impact, inappropriate growth, is seen as a global anxiety disorder how could we go about treating it? The paper argues that through changes in education and advertising this would lead to a more appropriate worldview creating an optimistic hypothesis for the future.

Over the last several decades there has been a shift in education away from the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake, as inquiry, to the acquisition of knowledge for enhanced performance measured by growth. This is an indication that humanity, as a resource - a human resource, is serving the economy to achieve growth. The paper argues that the role of the economy is to serve humanity, not the opposite.

Perhaps one of the reasons for our inability to avoid inappropriate growth is that our education system does not teach that growth which is detrimental, such as inappropriate excessive consumption, as a problem. As much of our education platform is problem based learning, and as unchecked harmful materialist growth is seen as legitimate business, it is not seen as a problem.

Keywords: education, worldview, advertising, leadership, futures thinking, unchecked growth, anxiety disorders, economic fundamentalism

Rise and Fall of Growth

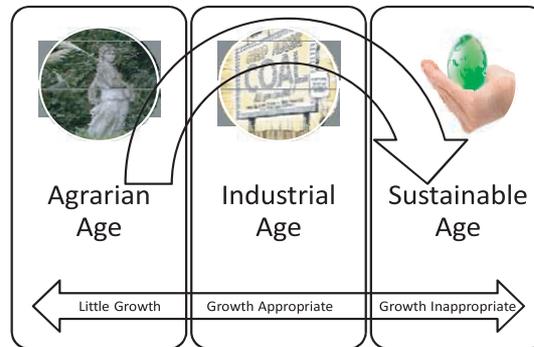


Figure 1. Rise and fall of growth

Introduction

As a global community, we stand a very good chance of overshooting and collapsing if we do not change our attitude to unchecked growth. Although growth made sense when humanity was getting started, established and learning how to live on this planet, unchecked growth, that is needless excessive consumerism and materialism, is no longer appropriate, but potentially destructive to the planet and humanity. We have been warned about this for some time (Buckminster Fuller, 1963; Markley, 1996; Randers, 2008). The adaptive challenge is whether we will we listen and respond appropriately.

However, we should not beat ourselves up too much about growths inception as growth did provide great opportunities for humanity to shift to a more secure and meaningful level of existence.

This paper was inspired by an interview Professor Richard Slaughter gave to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) television current affairs program the '7:30 Report' on New Year's Eve, 31st December 2010. Slaughter was the last person interviewed by this program for the decade and was wisely thought provoking in talking about the future for the next decade and beyond, particularly the role of education and advertising and the effects these have on our worldview.

In this paper the term economic growth is the increase in the value of goods and services produced by an economy.¹ It is conventionally measured as the percent rate of increase in real gross domestic product, or *GDP*. Growth is usually calculated in *real* terms, i.e. inflation-adjusted terms, in order to net out the effect of inflation on the price of the goods and services produced. In economics, "economic growth" or "economic growth theory" typically refers to growth of potential output, i.e., production at "full employment," rather than growth of aggregate demand.

Growth has also been defined as '*pathology*', an abnormal mass of tissue, such as a tumor, growing in or on a living organism. It is this analogy of growth that I am arguing has resulted from inappropriate economic growth.

It may be useful to think of economic fundamentalism and the belief in continuous unchecked growth, as with any fundamentalist doctrine, as an anxiety disorder, an underlying fear associated with change, an underlying 'illness' or 'malady', based on the belief that there is no other way of living our lives other than it being all about economic growth and needless consumption. If we thought of it this way, perhaps we could 'treat' it as a condition that can be remedied, starting with education and supported by advertising, which, in turn, reconstructs a more appropriate worldview for the times we live in.

This paper explores education, advertising and their effect on worldview. The paper also suggests that futures theory and methodology may be able to treat inappropriate growth as a worldview anxiety disorder in the same way that psychotherapy treats anxiety disorders.

The Rise of Growth

For a great deal of humanity's history there was little growth. This meant that only the strongest could survive those capable of hunting and gathering. This was appropriate for humans, as it was for other animals, as it kept the species strong enough to survive the conditions, sustaining life by eliminating genetic weaknesses as a potential threat to survival. For many humans, even today, this applies particularly in the poorer parts of Africa and Asia because they are unable to access the means of survival the rest of us have, as it does with many other life species.

With the coming of the agrarian age, growth as we know it emerged, enabling human life to shift to a higher level of survival and civilisation. Although I am not aware that there is evidence to suggest that greed didn't exist before we became farmers, my assumption is, from the evidence we do have, that survival depended on cooperation and collaboration of the collective rather than the individual doing his or her 'own' thing. However, we do have evidence that the agrarian age brought with it the beginning of that less admirable human trait – greed – and even worse than that, the downgrading of the equality of human individuality by the introduction of the class system – the haves and the have nots. These less desirable human traits, developed during the agrarian age, sadly, have survived through the centuries.

As humans developed from having no borders and no nations to creating borders and creating nationhood, some human civilisations still carried on with the elimination of genetic weakness, such as in ancient Sparta. If Spartan infants were too weak or sick, they were abandoned in the country to die. This was also a very common thing in the Greek world because Sparta made it an official government policy. Similarly, in the twentieth century, the Nazi regime sought to gain physical superiority by promoting the 'Aryan' race as the 'master race' and developed programs to maintain the 'purity' of this 'race' for civilisational and economic domination. While not espousing a specific economic philosophy, Hitler believed that individuals within a nation battled with each other for survival, and that such ruthless competition was good for the health of the nation, because it promoted "superior individuals" to higher positions in society. (Turner, 1985, p.76)

The significant change that growth produced for human civilisation was the 'industrial age', Newtonianism, the age of the machine, where 'the universe and societies were viewed as machines' (Bernard, 2008, p.69). This age had its critics from the beginning who saw the machine as a threat to the 'common' man and woman. Amongst others, Thomas Hardy, the English novelist, used novels such as 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' to portray the machine age as downgrading human dignity, which he portrayed as simple and honest farm labourers falling victim to the economic needs of the 'upper classes'. At least during the agrarian age farm labourers were highly valued and had jobs for life. Some were even cared for, in England for example, by the provision of 'Alms' homes by the land owners. These Alms homes provided comfort and shelter for the labourers' entire lives as land owners wealth depended entirely on the health and well being of the "employees". Keeping them content was the imperative.

The machine changed all that. It was seen as a more capable and less expensive servant to the land owner and the industrialist than humans and did not need the same level of shelter and protection. The machine age also heralded the beginning of unchecked inappropriate growth because it provided us with the capability for economic fundamentalism.

My observation is that economic fundamentalism is like any other fundamentalism in that for the fundamentalist there are no options; it must be *this* (their) way. Giving up these inappropriate and excessive defensive behaviour patterns is a crucial challenge, and extremely difficult for anyone, but especially difficult, I believe, for a fundamentalist.

"The banking crisis is a story that reaches far beyond the banks themselves. What we are experiencing are shudders running through the hull as our economic ship Titanic grinds onto the ice. Much of our current loss, pain and fear is because we remain lashed to the decks of a sinking system." (Van Lennep, 2010)

"The role of institutions goes beyond the legal framework. Government attitudes toward markets and freedoms and the efficiency of its operations are also very important: excessive bureaucracy and red tape, overregulation, corruption, dishonesty in dealing with public contracts, lack of transparency and trustworthiness, and the political dependence of the judicial system impose significant economic costs to businesses and slow the process of economic development.

In addition, proper management of public finances is also critical to ensuring trust in the national business environment.....

.....The recent global financial crisis, along with numerous corporate scandals, has highlighted the relevance of accounting and reporting standards and transparency for preventing fraud and mismanagement, ensuring good governance, and maintaining investor and consumer confidence. An economy is well served by businesses that are run honestly, where managers abide by strong ethical practices in their dealings with the government, other firms, and the public at large." (Sala-I-Martin et al, 2010-2011, p.4)

The Impacts of Growth

However, another fundamental source of energy is aspiration, the energy behind

the positive visions offered by an eco-centric worldview, a nature-centered, as opposed to human-centered, system of values (Rowe, 2004). Imagine a more dignified approach, where the association of wellbeing was centred on caring for each other and for our planet as guardians for future generations.

To illustrate this, during the Age of Reason, Sir Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) wrote (2002, p.369) "Above all things good policy is to be used so that the treasures and monies in a state be not gathered into a few hands.... Money is like muck, not good except it be spread."

There is mounting evidence to suggest that although people in the west are arguably wealthier than their parents, they are less happy. "The belief that more money makes us happier has all the characteristics of an addiction, one on which the survival of consumer capitalism depends. But a politics that has the courage to penetrate beneath the surface of material desire and to promise rich lives instead of riches, has an intuitive appeal for all but the most hard-bitten victims of consumer consciousness" writes Clive Hamilton (2003, p.209).

We can see a trend emerging that the quest for life is a quest for happiness, through which we might reach some purpose and meaning for our existence. As Richard Eckersley (2004) has written: "In the past, the quest for material progress and prosperity provided much of that "guiding story" for Western nations, perhaps especially the newer nations such as Australia and the US. It seems it no longer does. Progress needs to be redefined, the story rewritten, taking account of a new global context – social, economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual."

Eckersley, a visiting Fellow at the Australian National University, showed that money is now the prime motivator for US college students as shown in Figure 2 below.

Meaning or money? The goals of US college students

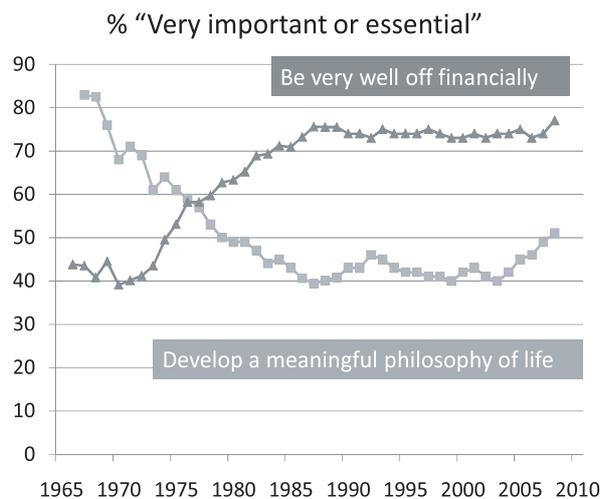


Figure 2. Meaning or money (Eckersley, 2010)

Eckersley (2006, pp.252–258) reported in the Journal of Epidemiology that the most important and growing cost of our modern way of life is 'cultural fraud': the promotion of images and ideals of 'the good life' that serve the economy but do not meet psychological needs or reflect social realities.'

"The recipe for living life to the fullest-if such a recipe exists-is to laugh heartily and often, play with abandon, appreciate beautiful things, build and maintain deep friendships, take pleasure in family, and enjoy the task at hand. It's a journey of life that counts, not the destination. How we cope with the obstacles that we inevitably encounter on that journey determines the richness of our life". (Kets de Vries, 2006, p.247)

This poses the question "What is happiness?" According to Griffin (2003, p.332) "In ordinary use, the word 'happiness' has to do with one's situation (one is fortunate) or with one's state of mind (one is glad, cheerful) or, typically, with both." If then our situation is one that is constantly "on-line" with the corresponding stress on us this creates, this must surely affect one's state of mind, making clear why achieving work-life balance has become such an urgent goal for many, particularly many in leadership positions.

It is the destructive growth that needs to be stopped, not growth that is constructive such as the growth of equality of equity on the quantitative scale, and also of gender and equal opportunity, on the qualitative scale, as a basic human right.

The '*human welfare and ecological footprints compared*' in Table 1 below emphasise the inequality of equity and its effect on global sustainability.

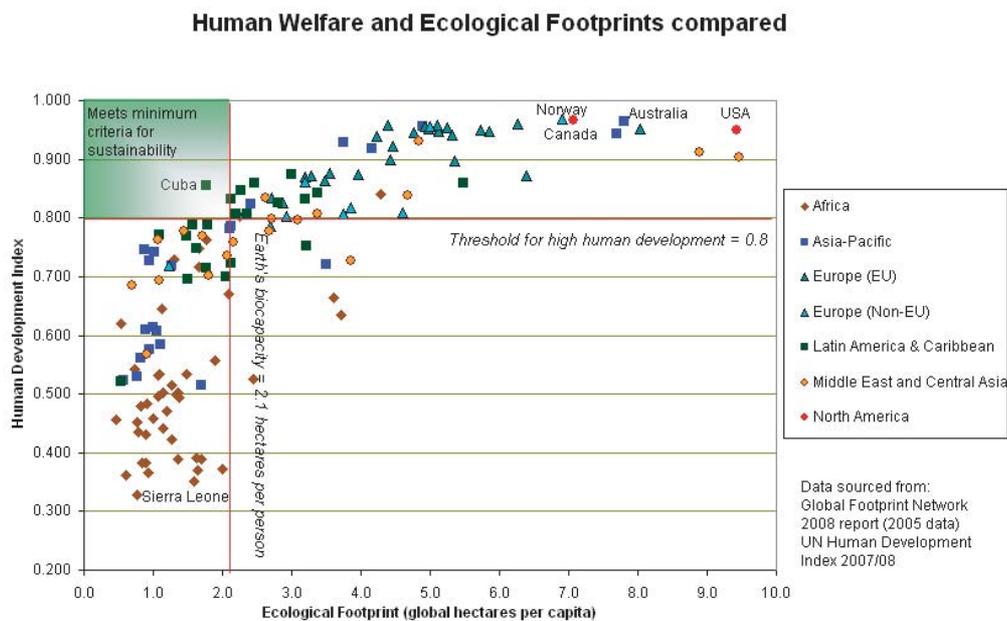


Figure 3. Human welfare and ecological footprints compared

Examples of greed started thousands of years ago. The first Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang (259–210 BCE) built a tomb for himself which, although of great archaeological and artistic significance, represents a symbol of greed at its most hideous, since hundreds of artisans and workers on the tomb site were buried alive with the Emperor on his death. Even today we have business 'leaders' who receive salary packages that represent obscene greed as inappropriate expectations of their worth; a very excessive or rapacious desire of the pursuit of wealth, status and power, particularly for men.

Ivana Milojevic writes (2010, p. 238):

Sadly, hegemonic masculinity is, now almost globally prevalent, courtesy of the expansion of patriarchal social arrangements in general, and colonialist and imperialist policies of Western civilisation in particular, amongst other occurrences. Thus, while always existing and manifesting locally – that is, within families, communities and nation states – the appropriate social and geo-historical context for hegemonic masculinity is a broader context of global patriarchal/dominator societies. Summarised by Eisler (2000, p.11), the main elements of such societies are;

- Existence of authoritarian structures within hierarchies of domination
- Higher ranking of males than females
- Institutionalisation of fear, violence and abuse
- High social investment in stereotypically "masculine" traits and activities, such as control and conquest of people and nature
- Myths and stories honouring and sacralising domination.

Milojevic continues "one of the main indicators of dominator/patriarchal societies is that everything connected with women and femininity (nurturing, educating, nonviolent-or "passive"-conflict resolution) is automatically given a lesser value."

...women are shamed not for being too submissive, dependent, unaggressive, and sexually inactive or impotent, as men are, but rather, for exactly the opposite traits: being too rebellious, independent, aggressive, and sexually active. Thus, if a woman responds to being shamed by becoming aggressive or violent, that may only lead to more shame rather than, as for men, to less. (Gilligan, 2001, p.58 cited by Milojevic, 2010)

Education, Advertising and Worldview: Creation of an Optimistic Hypothesis

If economic fundamentalism and its impact, inappropriate growth, are seen as a global anxiety disorder how could we go about treating it? Figure 4 below argues that through changes in education and advertising this would lead to a more appropriate worldview creating an optimistic hypothesis for the future.

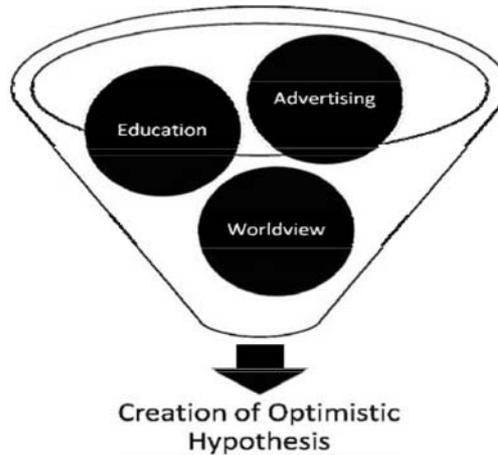


Figure 4. Funnelling education, advertising and worldview to create an optimistic hypothesis

Education: Its Role in the Creation of Worldviews

Without a change in the way we currently educate ourselves and our children to believe in and worship the promise of the continuing growth scenario, any change appears difficult, if not impossible.

Baroness Susan Greenfield, Professor of Pharmacology at Oxford University and a Director of the Royal Institution, wrote (2008, p.153) "Just imagine a future society where status, being Someone in the real world, need no longer matter because it's offset by living most of the time in the cyber-world. Could it be that for the first time, the ideal is, after all, to be a nobody?"

Greenfield claims that social networking websites are causing alarming changes in the brains of young users. Websites such as 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' are said to shorten attention spans, make young people more self-centered and encourage instant gratification. Greenfield believes that repeated exposure could effectively "rewire" the brain. Other factors include computer games and fast-paced television shows:

"For some time now, concern has been rising that the internet is changing our brains; and not for the better. That we may be becoming 'information hunter gatherers' rather than 'knowledge cultivators', as a result of distraction and instant gratification courtesy of the internet and other new technologies. Others, however, argue that new approaches to learning and sharing will bring other benefits and new forms of intelligence." (Wintour, 2009)

It is not surprising that achieving a reasonable work-life balance has popped up so dramatically because the promise of the information age was that we would work fewer hours and have more meaningful time to enjoy life.

The irony however is the opposite. The information age, with its glittering array of techno wizardry, has not increased our work-life balance but reduced it. This has meant less personal freedom, more stress and consequently a reduction in happiness.

When was the last time you went anywhere without your mobile phone? This is clearly a major adaptive leadership challenge. So how do we meet this challenge? One way is through education.

Over the last few decades we have seen a shift in education away from the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake, as inquiry, to the acquisition of specific information as a means to a defined end for enhanced performance. This is an indication that humanity, as a resource – a human resource, is serving the economy. What should be the case is that the economy is serving humanity. This has led to a performance cult that I described in my article "The cult of performance: what are we doing when we don't know what we are doing" (Burke, 2004).

It may seem incongruous that a person from a business school should be challenging the notion of continuous growth, because that is what a business school proposes. As James Dator (2009, pp.8-9) reported "Continued growth" is the "official" view of the future of all modern governments, educational systems, and organisations. The purpose of government, education, and all aspects of life in the present and recent past, is to build a vibrant economy, and to develop the people, institutions, and technologies to keep the economy growing and changing, forever.

But even within business schools there is growing and continuing support for limits to growth. As Chris Nichols, Ashridge Business School, wrote (2010, p.3):

There are at least three deeply held fantasies that underlie almost all day to day business thinking and which make the current way of doing strategy unfit in almost all organisations. These are:

- *The fantasy of limitless growth.* First, there is a pervasive belief that our society is only successful if its economy is growing.
- *The fantasy of actions without consequences.* Secondly we have the fantasy of "actions without consequences", the idea that we can act in this way and that it will not have consequences that we need to consider or be responsible for.
- *The fantasy of separateness* (and the crisis of fragmentation). Thirdly, this fantasy allows we humans to believe that we are somehow separate from, and "other than", the rest of the environment in which we live our lives.

Perhaps one of the reasons for our inability to avoid inappropriate growth is that our education system does not see it as a problem. As much of our education platform is problem based learning, many managers and others in roles of authority believe that their task is simply problem solving. So as growth is not seen as inappropriate, it is not seen as a problem. However education is more than maintenance as it also relates to the meaning we give to the new things we create. Ian Rumfitt (2003, p.548) writes "...that questions about meaning are essentially questions about understanding: 'a model of meaning is a model of understanding'. Whilst the problem solver tries to make something go away, the creator tries to bring something new and meaningful into being.

Creating something new of value to society remains the challenge today, one that is not new. The eminent economist, John Maynard Keynes wrote in 1931 (1972: Preface, p.xviii):

Thus the author of these essays, for all his croakings, still hopes and believes that

the day is not far off when the economic problem will take a back seat where it belongs, and that the arena of the heart and head will be occupied, or reoccupied, by our real problems – the problem of life and human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion. And it happens that there is a subtle reason drawn from economic analysis why, in this case, faith may work. For if we consistently act on the optimistic hypothesis, this hypothesis will tend to be realised; whilst by acting on the pessimistic hypothesis we can keep ourselves for ever in the pit of want.

Howard Gardner's 'Project Zero' (1983), argues that we are relatively poor at measuring some of the most valued human attributes like creativity and wisdom. Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University, developed his theory of multiple intelligences in 1983. It suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is far too limited, and he shows that:

- 0-4 years of age all children were at genius level in terms of multiple frames of intelligence
- By age 20 dropped to 10%
- Over age 20 dropped to 2 %

Sir Ken Robinson (2010), the UK education and creative innovation expert, argues for radical changes in how we should think about our own intelligence and creativity - and in how we should educate our children and each other to meet the extraordinary challenges of living and working in the 21st century. He argues our problems in education originate in our schools and universities, that stifle creativity and imagination by 'batch' operating, i.e. putting children into classes based on their age rather than their interests and skills.

Robinson confirmed Gardner's findings and did tests with kindergarten children up to age 4, tests of complex problems for which they achieved a 98% success rate. The same test carried out on children aged 8 – 10 years showed that this had dropped to 50% and by 13-15 years of age its drop was much greater.

Better ways of education based on passion and creativity are called for.

Advertising

While advertising is convincing us to establish our identities as associated with the material things we have (Human Havings) or want to do (Human Doings) rather than to who we are being (Human Beings), they will continue the 'brainwashing' scenario that 'brand' marketing wants. This is then espoused through 'good' business management education.

Donella Meadows, one of the authors of the 'The Limits to Growth' suggested a framework for sustainable development indicators (1998, pp.40-68) to focus on:

- The hierarchy from ultimate means to ultimate ends
- Natural capital (ultimate means)
- Built capital (intermediate means)
- Human capital (intermediate means/ends)
- Social capital (intermediate ends)
- Well-being (ultimate ends)
- Integration (translating ultimate means into ultimate ends)

Limits to growth literature can often take a materialistic approach. For example, The CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems working papers series 2008-09, Graham Turner's (2007) revisit of the Club of Rome's 'Limits to Growth', 'A comparison of the limits to growth with thirty years of reality'. Turner supported Meadows conclusion that the global system is on an unsustainable trajectory unless there is substantial and rapid reduction in consumptive behaviour, in combination with technological progress.

Richard Slaughter (Slaughter, 2010) argues for a more dignified advertising industry. He believes that we've been subject to a kind of psychic assault over the last several decades telling us things that actually aren't very helpful: that we need to buy and consume more, that our identities are tied up with what we have and who we are. He thinks that's been a huge misdirection, and that we actually need to shift from a worldview of "what can I have" to "what I can be", as argued above. That's a much more productive area.

Worldview

Worldview can be seen as our automatic thoughts, the way we see the world, or any situation we encounter. We need to shift from a self-centered, materialist worldview to an eco-centric Earth centered worldview.

The so called 'Information age' is simply an extension of the machine age, albeit redefining humans' relationship with machines. NHL intelligence (non humanlike intelligence), transhumanism and singularity, are the 'great' breakthroughs that information technology 'machines' offer. Social technology has provided tremendous opportunities for human kind to re-evaluate their interactions and relationships with each other, but it also brings the possibility of even greater inequality between the haves and the have nots. The have nots may be excluded altogether because they have no presence, whatsoever, in cyber space - out of sight, out of mind.



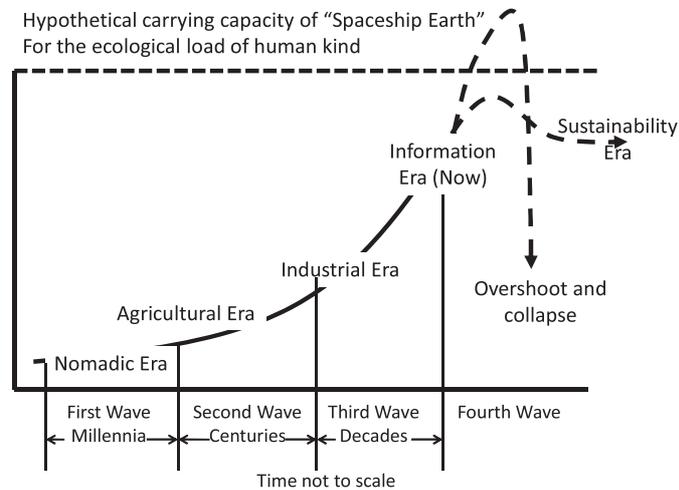
Figure 5. Economic and social value differences
<http://clearlygrey.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/greed.gif?w=500&h=388>

The above cartoon emphasises the relationship of, and the different values associated with, the behaviours of greed. 90% of the world's stock market transactions do not contribute anything to the productivity of people or business (Forex, 2011, p.3).

The amount based on speculation is much more than the volumes of commercial and financial transactions in the currency market. Speculation is about traders buying and selling on a short-term basis depending on minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour, and day-to-day price fluctuations. Estimates say that more than 90 percent of daily trading volume comes from speculation (meaning, commercial or investment-based transactions account for less than 10 percent of the average daily volume).

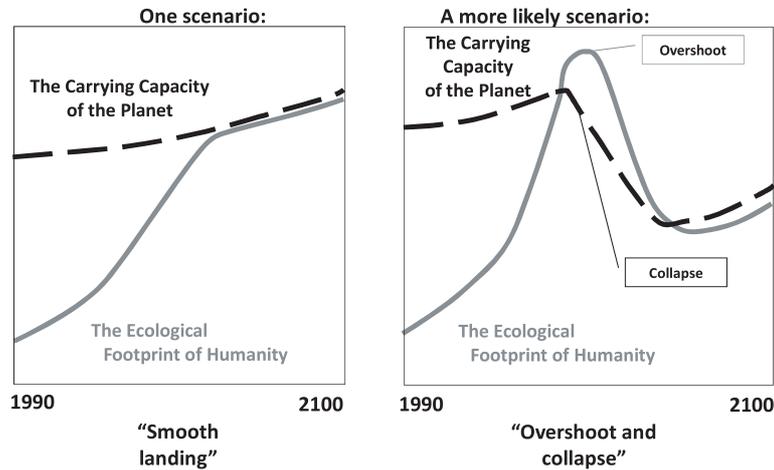
Randers (2008, p.853) questioned 'Is it possible that the slow societal response to the emerging climate crisis may result in "global collapse"—that is, a situation where global society first exceeds the sustainable rate of greenhouse gas emissions, and then experiences a sudden, unwanted, and unstoppable decline in the average welfare of hundreds of millions of its citizens?'

If so, the survival question, and one our advertising industry could engage effectively with, is "How do we change our current growth worldview to a more appropriate sustainability worldview?"



Oliver Markley (1996, p.623)

How resilient are we?



Jørgen Randers (2008, p.858)

Figure 6. Overshoot and collapse

Figure 6 above illustrate Markley's (1996, p.623) and Randers (2008, p.858) view of the carrying capacity of the planet. If society could acknowledge and accept that the age we live in now is the 'Sustainability Age', not the information age, change for the better may emerge. This shift in our consciousness, our worldview, suggests that we will need to redefine what we mean by growth and, with that redefining, what we mean by work, by social interaction, by surviving and thriving together. In addition this means redefining what it means to be human and embracing neo-humanism, our understanding of what it is to be human by promoting an ecological awareness of our relationship with the entire universe.

We need to understand these interactions and how they play out in our everyday actions to truly grasp their impact on our behaviour in transcending the inappropriateness of continuous unchecked growth.

One of the main points that Irvin Yalom makes about group psychotherapy, and I see in Futures Studies, is with the instillation of hope and universality. Yalom states (1995, p.4-5) that group therapy not only draws from the general ameliorative effects of positive expectations but also benefits from a source of hope that is unique to the group format. This is where I see the value of futures studies and thinking in showing that it is not only possible, but preferable, to share with each other how together we can create a worldview that ensures a sustainable environment and is non-destructive to future generations and their needs.

Hyman and Rudorfer (2000) claim that there are, in general, two types of treatment for anxiety disorders – medication and specific types of psychotherapy – both of which can be effective. However in certain conditions, such as panic disorders and

specific phobias, only psychotherapy has been found to be effective, in particular Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) has two components. The cognitive component helps people change thinking patterns that keep them from overcoming their fears. The behavioural component of CBT seeks to change people's reactions to anxiety-provoking situations.

Futures studies and thinking helps with changing thinking patterns and overcoming the anxiety that is a normal human condition associated with change – not a disorder. Futures studies and thinking achieves this by guiding people to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable, using anxiety as something that is potentially productive. That is, they can become more comfortable with facing up to the need for change, even radical change.

In treating the anxiety disorder that an end to unchecked continued growth creates, there are other methods than medication! It is possible that rigorous futures studies and thinking may have the same therapeutic effect that medication and CBT has for this particular disorder, especially if we consider that the proponents of the continuous growth scenario are possibly suffering from an anxiety disorder that the cessation of the continuous growth scenario creates for them. We do know from research that some, perhaps many, people in powerful positions are using illicit drugs and alcohol to self medicate panic disorders and specific phobias they may have, often associated with their own self image (Schott, 1999). For example, it is common for an anxiety disorder to be accompanied by another anxiety disorder or another illness. Often people who have panic disorder or social phobia, for example, also experience the intense sadness and hopelessness associated with depression, to which the 'modern' consumption based society has contributed.

Perhaps futures thinking would offer a more positive approach and outcome for them. Changing perceptions about the self, through a new discourse, a new narrative, especially as the self relates to others, creates a new inner search for meaning and connectedness, a new understanding of the forces of togetherness and separateness. The forces of togetherness and separateness are biologically rooted. Without them we would not have evolved, as we survive by being together as a group in organisations or in communities. Forces such as values, rules, and notions of how we do things in life create the culture that keeps an organisation or a community a cohesive unit.

What could be Achieved Should We Change Our Approach.

Unchecked and unconscious consumerism is at the root of many of the world problems. We need a change in consciousness. James Martin (2006) claims that most people will eventually want to participate in the affluence of the planet. This cannot happen with twentieth-century lifestyles. We will need higher-quality lifestyles that are environmentally harmless. Martin (2006) states that rich, affluent, globally sustainable lifestyles, more satisfying than today's, can be achieved at the same time as healing the environment. Perhaps the greatest catastrophe that could befall us would be that we inadvertently push Gaia, our living planet Earth, so far that positive feedback causes its living systems to flip into a different, deteriorated and less resilient, state.

The 21st Century must put the science in place to regulate human behaviour to live in harmony with our living planet. This will be essential for future centuries.

Much has been written about raising the base of the pyramid and the positive effects this would have. Mohammed Yunis and the Grameen Bank have proved through microfinance how entrepreneurial people can flourish when given a chance. Microfinance helps people to escape poverty by giving them collateral-free loans and other financial services to support income-generating businesses. As each loan is repaid, the money is redistributed as loans to others, thereby multiplying its impact.

C. K. Prahalad and Stuart Hart (2002), in their article 'The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid', have also demonstrated this.

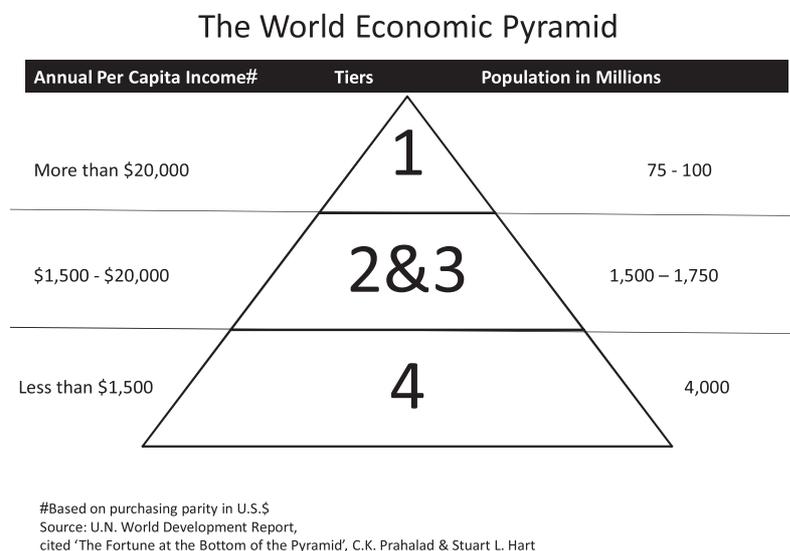


Figure 7. World economic pyramid (Prahalad & Hart)

We will need to be conscious how we go about raising the base of the pyramid avoiding the unchecked continuous growth scenario the western worldview has created.

A June 2010 McKinsey and Company report by Peter Bisson, Rik Kirkland, and Elizabeth Stephenson called 'The Great Rebalancing' demonstrates this concern and the report claims "that as the centre of economic growth shifts from developed to developing countries, global companies should focus on innovation to win in low-cost, high-growth countries. Their survival elsewhere may depend on it". Winning is 'business speak' for economic gain for individual corporations. This narrow view leads, I argue, to unchecked inappropriate growth.

What this McKinsey report highlighted was the spreading of the continuous growth worldview, not a change to it. Arguably in the short term this will be seen in a positive light. However, it may not be sustainable long term because it is based on the "same factors (that) powered Western economic growth for the better part of two cen-

turies" that is, economic growth and its eventual impact, needless consumption.

The report continues "Consider that more than 70 million people are crossing the threshold to the middle class each year, virtually all in emerging economies. By the end of the decade, roughly 40 percent of the world's population will have achieved middle-class status by global standards, up from less than 20 percent today". This assumes 'business-as-usual' futures that addiction to growth makes increasingly unlikely.

The report states "that two socioeconomic movements are under way.

- Declining dependency ratios. Virtually all major emerging markets are undergoing demographic shifts that historically have unleashed dynamic economic change: simultaneous labor force growth and rapidly declining birthrates. Simply put, there will be more workers, with fewer mouths to feed, leaving more disposable income.
- The largest urban migration in history. Each week, nearly one-and-a-half-million people move to cities, almost all in developing markets. The economic impact: dramatic gains in output per worker as people move off subsistence farms and into urban jobs. China and India are seeing labor productivity grow at more than five times the rate of most Western countries as traditionally agrarian economies become manufacturing and service powerhouses.

These same factors powered Western economic growth for the better part of two centuries and they should last well into the next decade—at least until China's population, finally seeing the full effects of the one-child policy, begins to go gray".

Perhaps the most debilitating trend in modern business, if not modern life, is the ever increasing lack of meaning, partially due to the effects of technological unemployment and technological intervention, but also the discovery of new ways of economising the use of labour, which is outrunning the pace at which we can find new uses for it. The McKinsey report called this "The economic impact: dramatic gains in output per worker as people move off subsistence farms and into urban jobs". If we were to shift our worldview to an Earth-centered worldview, an eco-centric worldview, the new industries this would create, such as the planet repair industry, would blossom and new uses for meaningful labour would emerge. This would be constructive appropriate growth.

Examples of non-destructive business perspectives, post-growth, that would benefit humanity and the planet are the Earth repair business, artificial meat production, and raising the bottom of the pyramid in an ecologically sustainable way.

Given greater investment, and a true commitment to ecological sustainable change, we can begin to imagine that rather than burning coal we could turn it into valuable topsoil and help repair the earth. Doing this would mean that the coal industry does not have to vanish when inevitably new cleaner energy sources become viable and readily available.

Imagine that rather than destroying the Amazon rain forests to grow soya or to create pastures for more and more cattle destined for the table we could learn to eat artificially created meat. NASA and others have shown that creating artificial meat on a grand scale is viable. The Amazon farmers could then be rewarded for restoring the forest for the benefit of humankind and the planet.

"Cultured meat could also reduce the pollution that results from raising livestock, and you wouldn't need the drugs that are used on animals raised for meat. With a single cell, you could theoretically produce the world's annual meat supply. And you could do it in a way that's better for the environment and human health. In the long term, this is a very feasible idea."²

These are just three examples of what is possible – now.

For these strategies to work, it is very important that we understand what strategy is. Strategy is *what you actually do*. It cannot be anything else. Strategy is not what you say, espouse, what you are going to do. Strategy happens in the present, in the now, by us. Strategic and business planning, although very important, is still just espoused strategy – it is not strategy in action. This is why futures thinking matters - it is the thinking you need to do before you even think about strategy. It is the rigour needed to create the relevance. To be able to change, you have to know what it is you want to change. Therefore linking culture, strategy and leadership is critical.

For example, it is often quoted that less than 10% of strategic plans are ever implemented. It appears that from this we can infer that we do strategic planning as a social defence against anxiety! We do it at such a low level of discomfort usually as an extrapolation from the past being projected into the future, a future which, the plan infers, remains somehow static.

Conclusion

Hausman & McPherson (2000, p.230) reported that unlike many other sciences, economics is linked both to ethics and to the theory of rationality. Although many economists regard economics as a 'positive' science of one sort of social phenomena, economics is built around a normative theory of rationality, and has a special relevance to policy making and the criticism of social institutions. Economics complements and intersects with moral philosophy in both the concepts it has constructed and in its treatment of normative problems.

Arguably the normative problems have evolved with justifications and rationality that support the concept that humanity serves the economy, rather than the economy serving humanity. This has occurred with the advent of the industrial revolution and the move from the agrarian era to corporations (Industrial Era) from where shareholder value, in economic terms, took precedence over anything else in business.

This places a high degree of emphasis on raising the base of the pyramid quickly in order to give hope for the future of a fairer and more equitable society. A study by the World Institute for Development Economics Research at United Nations University reports that the richest 1% of adults alone owned 40% of global assets in the year 2000, and that the richest 10% of adults accounted for 85% of the world total. The bottom half of the world adult population owned 1% of global wealth (Davies et al, 2006).

In an earlier article (Burke, 2006, p.23) I redefined growth as:

Greed
Reduction, therefore

Opportunities are
Widened, which is
Triumphing
Humanity

The rigour of futures thinking could provide a new level of involvement with, and understanding of, the importance of sustainability knowledge and of the way forward for the sustainability age. Action learning can be seen as experiential learning whereas anticipatory action learning (futures thinking in action) can be seen as an inner search for meaning and purpose, as a futures experience, through a search for a preferred future.

The need for changes in education, advertising and worldviews means embracing 'relational leadership', to create an environment which is a healing environment, where it feels safe to learn and understand your relationships and to explore your own and other's behaviour in new ways.

This is an adaptive leadership challenge. There are many technical issues that need to be resolved but the adaptive leadership challenge still seems to be how can nations all work better together in order to meet our purpose of saving the planet for future generations?

The current problem is one of an anxiety-driven regression in functioning. In regression, people work to relieve the anxiety of the moment rather than act on principle and a long-term view. Bowen (1978, p.472) calls this a 'Societal Emotional Process', a concept that describes how the emotional system governs behaviour on a societal level, promoting both progressive and regressive periods in society.

Anticipatory action learning, futures studies and thinking, immerses themselves in macrohistory and philosophy and, I am arguing, in psychotherapy particularly the post-structural disciplines of psychotherapy such as phenomenology, existential and post-structural narrative therapy. Therapy, in that anticipatory action learning can play a significant role in the search for meaning. For organisations this could be a necessary 'healing journey' for them through a discourse on purpose and meaning.

This new discourse would be a useful way of experimenting with ways to shift the unchecked continuous growth worldview, the greatest single threat humanity faces.

Futures studies and anticipatory action learning are remedies to the anxiety disorder and a way to transition past addictions/attachments to the status quo. The post growth business opportunities are potentially enormous and easily viable. Imagine the satisfaction and hope as humanity re-establishes its role as part of the planet, as a co inhabitant, not as its owner who does what it pleases, but as its custodian, its servant, its protector.

Note

Applied Futures Thinking or Anticipatory Action Learning for organisations has one main advantage, its ability to enhance the capacity of organisational executives to better understand organisational futures through education and memetic change. Anticipatory Action Learning brings together the tenets of Action Learning and post-strategic work that, when operating together, create fundamental principles of respect,

open-mindedness and integrity that can translate across crises and cultures, according to Sohail Inayatullah. This was the quote Julie Macken made in the Australian Financial Review article 'New learning curve sends planners back to the future' January 1, 1999 following interviews she had with Sohail Inayatullah, Tony Stevenson, who was then President of the World Futures Studies Federation, and myself towards the end of the 20th century. It strikes me that futurists are asked to comment on a preferred future at significant times, such as this and with Richard Slaughter at the end of the last decade.

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Notes

1. From www.worldiq.com
2. From Universe Today, July 6, 2005.

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