



Trajectories

Spirituality as the fourth bottom line?

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1. Times have changed

In Australia, Westpac Bank recently issued an expanded approach to traditional accountability standards. They now measure their progress through three criteria: prosperity, social justice and environment. Their recent corporate report [23] includes claims of ethical business, transparency, human rights, environmental concerns, caring for employees, and more. Suddenly the bottom line is not so simple—it has become the triple bottom line. Organizations have their own interests—profit, survival—but as well they live in a local and global community, and are increasingly being forced to become accountable to them. These demands by shareholder groups and social movements have led to the need for social justice and social measures. Organizations and communities live with and in a natural world, and believe that they have a responsibility towards planetary sustainability—environment is no longer something out there for others to solve, an economic externality, rather, it has become defining for the success of an organization, certainly for its public persona. Along with external issues (impact of company policy on the environment, ethical investing) have been internal issues (employee absenteeism, illness and the cost savings associated with having wellness-based organizations).

With over 45% of the world's top companies publishing triple bottom line reports, the triple bottom line movement has taken off [4]. Even nations are following suite with broader indicators. Bhutan has developed a gross happiness index. While OECD nations have not gone this far, the UK is taking happiness seriously. “In the UK, the Cabinet Office has held a string of seminars on life satisfaction... [publishing] a paper recommending policies that might increase the nation's happiness.” [20]. These include quality of life indicators when making decisions about health and education, and finding an alternative to

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gross domestic product as a measure of how well the country is doing—one that reflects happiness as well as welfare, education and human rights.” [3]. There are even professors and journals [19] of happiness.

Happiness can be considered an inner measure of quality of life, moving away from the quantity of things. As nations move to postmodern economies, other issues are becoming more important, along with the iconic/dream/aesthetic [15] is the spiritual. It is ceasing to be associated with mediums or with feudal religions, but with life meaning, and Ananda, or the bliss beyond pleasure and pain.

But while indicators are broadening and the single bottom line is being supplanted by the triple bottom, and there may be a subtle shift toward the spiritual, can it become the fourth bottom line? We certainly do not see stakeholders holding long meditations outside of corporate offices and government buildings?

By spiritual I mean four interrelated factors. (1) A relationship with the transcendent, generally seen as both immanent and transcendental. This relationship is focused on trust, surrender and for Sufis, submission. (2) A practice, either regular meditation or some type of prayer (but not prayer where the goal is to ask for particular products or for the train to come quicker). (3) A physical practice to transform or harmonize the body—yoga, tai chi, chi kung, and other similar practices. (4) Social—a relationship with the community, global, or local, a caring for others [8]. This differs from a debate on whose God, or who is true and who is false, to an epistemology of depth and shallow with openness and inclusion toward others.[10]

2. Indicators

Are there any indicators that spirituality can become a bottom line and evidence? First, we need to admit that we are on dangerous ground. Languaging the Transcendent more often than not leads to genderizing, and thus immediately disenfranchises half the world’s population. Along with the problem of patriarchy, comes the problem of caste/class, elite groups claiming they can best interpret the transcendental. The transcendent becomes a weapon, linguistic, political, economic; it becomes a source of power and territory, to control.

And yet, this is the nature of our world. All concepts can be utilized as such, especially, profound ones. The key, as Ashis Nandy [14] points out, is that there will be escape ways from our futures—that contradictions are built into all of our measures and methods and that we need competing views of the spiritual.

Taking a layered view might be the most appropriate way to consider measuring the immeasurable. Using the metaphor of the iceberg of spirituality, the tip of the iceberg of could be measurable, as that is the most visible. A bit deeper are the social dimensions of the spiritual—community caring, even group meditations, shared experiences—the system of spirituality. This too can be evidenced. Deeper is the worldview of spirituality—ethics, ecology, devotion, multiple paths, transcendence—and deepest is the mythic level, the mystical alchemy of the self. As we go deeper, measurement becomes more problematic, and the deepest is of course impossible to measure.

Is there any evidence that spirituality as an issue is gaining in interest? There appears to be. As anecdotal personal experience, workshop after workshop (in Croatia, Pakistan,

Malaysia, Australia, Thailand, Germany, Taiwan, New Zealand, Hawaii, for example) the spiritual future comes out as the desirable [9]. It generally has the following characteristics. (1) Individual spirituality. (2) Gender partnership or cooperation. (3) Strong ecological communities. (4) Technology embedded in society but not as the driver. (5) Economic alternatives to capitalism. (6) Global governance. Other significant futures also emerge, particularly that of societal collapse and that of ‘global tech’—a digitalized, geneticized, abundant and globally governed world.

Importantly, the spiritual (Gaian) vision of the future confirms the qualitative and quantitative research work of Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson [18]. They document a new phenomena, the rise of the cultural creatives. This new group challenges the modernist interpretation of the world (nation-state centric, technology and progress will solve the day, environment is important but security more so) and the traditional view of the world (strong patriarchy, strong religion, and strong culture, agriculture based and derived). Ray and Anderson go so far as to say that up to 25% of those in OECD nations now subscribe to the spiritual/eco/gender partnership/global governance/alternative to capitalism position. However, they clearly state that cultural creatives do not associate themselves as a political or social movement (for example while near American president, Al Gore meditates, he does not use his spirituality as part of his politics, while Bush using traditional religion does). Indeed, cultural creatives represent a potential paradigm change, a change in values.

It is this change in values that Oliver Markley, Willis Harmon and Duane Elgin and others have been spearheading [21]. They have argued that we are in between images. The traditional image of ‘man’ as economic worker (the modernist image) has reached a point of fatigue, materialism is being questioned. Internal contradictions (breakdown of family, life style diseases) and external contradictions (biodiversity loss, global warming) and systemic contradictions (global poverty) lead to the conclusion that the system cannot maintain its legitimacy. The problem, especially for the rich nations, along with security from terrorism, has become a hunger for meaning and a desire for the experience of bliss.

There is data that confirms that materialism does not lead to happiness. “One study, by Tim Kasser of Knox College in Galesburg, IL, found that young adults who focus on money, image and fame tend to be more depressed, have less enthusiasm for life and suffer more physical symptoms such as headaches and sore throats than others.” [2]. Indeed, Kasser believes that advertising, central to the desire machine, should be considered a form of pollution, and be taxed or advertisers should be forced to include warning messages that materialism can damage one’s health.

Equally important to spiritually becoming a fourth bottom line is that spiritual practices can now be empirically witnessed. Recent advances in brain research show the brain being lit up in areas related to positive moods. Studying Buddhist monks while they meditate in MRI machines has led to startling conclusions, among them that the “monks’ meditation practice, which changes their neural physiology, enables them to respond with equanimity to sources of stress.” [5]. This was true not just for monks but for middle class Americans as well. Richard Davidson, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, found out that “after a short time meditating, meditation had profound effects not just on how they felt but on their brains and bodies.”. Meditation appears to stimulate the left prefrontal lobe, which is related to feelings of well-being and happiness [7]. Another study of Buddhists by scientists at the University of California has

also found that meditation might tame the amygdala, the part of the brain involved with fear and anger. The key is that spirituality and meditation is brought into the visible world. “Meditation can help you train your mind in the way exercise can train your body.” [6].

These studies have gained currency for two reasons. First, with over 200 billion\$ lost in the USA because of stress related illnesses, meditation is gaining interest as a way to reduce costs and enhance productivity. Second, is the emergence of the brain discourse, the search for validity of emotions/senses at the neurological level (similar to the gene discourse, with the search for the genetic basis of behavior).

However, spirituality, while enhancing, economic productivity, social connectivity, inner and outer health should not be confused with economic materialism or indeed any type of materialism (even the spiritual variety, that is, collecting gurus, mantras, or using the spiritual to accumulate ego).

3. Spirituality and educational-life transformation

The emerging image of cultural creatives may not have enough staying power as it is largely associated with the baby boomer generation [1]. While the spiritual is linked to personal health, it is yet to be linked to economic justice and social inclusion. Spiritual practices often lead to an escape from the material world. Moreover, the languaging of the spiritual remains nationalistic or groupist, and not neo-humanistic (i.e. outside of the dogma of class, varna, nation and gender).

But as philosopher P.R. Sarkar has argued, a new theory of economy would make the spiritual central [17]. This is partly evidenced by reports from the TM organization [22] which documents hundreds of scientific studies claiming increased IQ, productivity and even increased community peace. But for Sarkar, spiritual practices lead to clarity. It is this clarity which can enhance productivity. Spiritual practices allow clarity of intent (and a slowing of time) thus enhancing productivity. Sarkar’s model of political-economy, PROUT, is based on this—increasingly using intellectual and spiritual resources for the good of all. Along with the progressive use of resources is a clear ceiling and floor of wealth—a progressively linked top and bottom. Meditation, importantly, impacts the ‘bottom’ of society, with meditation leading to decreased recidivism among prisoners, among other benefits [11].

4. Grand patterns

For those who study the grand patterns of change, this is not surprising. Modernity has brought the nation-state, stunning technology, material progress but the pendulum has shifted so far toward sensate civilization that it would be surprising if the spiritual as a foundational civilizational perspective did not return. In this sense, spirituality as fourth bottom line should not be seen as selling to global ‘corporatopia’ but in fact ensuring that the pendulum does not take us back to medieval times but spirals forward. This means keeping the scientific, inclusionary, mystical parts of spirituality but not acceding to

the dogmatic, the sexist, the feudal dimensions. That is, all traditions grow up in certain historical conditions, once history changes, there is no need to keep the trappings, the message remains important but there is no need to retreat to a cave.

It is also not surprising that it is gender that defines cultural creatives. Modernity has been defined by male values as were earlier eras, there is likely gender dialectic at work. Patriarchy has reached its limits. It is often those outside the current system who are the torch bearers for the new image of the future. In this case, gender is crucial. Of course, the system remains patriarchy laden. Individuals may change but the system, for example, city design, remains faulty.

However, the triple bottom line, and spirituality as the fourth, may be a way to start to change the system so that it is spiritual-friendly, instead of ridiculing and marginalizing it. This could be the very simple use of Feng Shui to a rethinking of shopping to suburban planning. And, individuals want this change. Phillip Daffara in his research on the future of the Sunshine Coast reports that over 30% desire a Gaian coast—a living coast where technology and spirit are embedded in the design and policies of the area. Others preferred the triple bottom line sustainability model and the linked villages model. Only a few percent still desire business as usual [13].

The evidence does point to a desire for a spiritual future, throughout the world. Indeed, sociologist Riaz Hussain writes that this complicated matters for Al-Qaeda. They become even more radicalized as the Islamic world is in the process of a religious revival [16]. However, religiosity is not necessarily spirituality. They overlap. But one is exclusive, text-based only and generally closed to other systems and worldviews. The spiritual is not linked to race or nation. However, it is certainly the deeper part of every religion.

For spirituality to become part of the global solution it will have to become transmodern, moving through modernity, not rejecting the science and technology revolution and the Enlightenment, nor acceding to postmodernity (where all values and perspectives are relativized) or the premodern (where feudal relations are supreme).

5. Measures

But for spirituality to become associated with the quadruple bottom line, the bottom line will be finding measures. Measuring the immeasurable will not be an easy task. We need to ensure that measures match the four dimensions—transcendental, mind practice, body practice, and relationship, the neo-humanistic dimension of inclusion, an expanded sense of identity.

Measurements as well would need to be layered, touching on the easiest and obvious—the ice berg metaphor—physical practices (% in a locale engaged in regular meditation or disciplined prayer) to systemic measurements (city design) to worldview ones (neo-humanism as demonstrated in educational textbooks). Of course, this is for spirituality generally, for organizations, we would need measures that showed the movement from the command-control model to the learning organization model, to a vision of a living, learning and healing, conscious organization.

What are some potential indicators? There are positive indicators such as well-being, happiness (qualitative measures) and negative ones (far easier to collect). Death by lifestyle diseases to measure worldview and system contradictions. Suicide indicators to measure societal failure. Hate crime indicators and bullying in schools and organizations that help us understand levels of inclusion. Cooperative growth, looking at economic partnership, at new models of economy. Cigarette consumption. Treatment of animals (wider ethics). These are just a few. This is not an easy process at any level. For example, some believe that enhanced spirituality in itself can lead to reduction in automobile fatalities [12]. While practising meditation leads to less road rage, more clarity, less drunken driving, changing transportation systems is equally important.

Finally, there is an additional challenge. In spiritual life there can be dark nights of the soul, where one wrestles with one's own contradictions—it is this that cannot be measured, nor can the experience of Ananda. However, after the experience of bliss, there is the issue of translating, of creating a better world.

Even with a world engulfed by weapons sales, by killing, even in a world of rampant materialism, of feeling less, of unhappiness, even in communities beset by trauma, what is clear is that the spiritual is becoming part of a new world paradigm of what is real, what is important. What is needed is a debate on indicators that can evaluate this new paradigm in process.

References

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- [4] L. Colquhoun, "Corporate social responsibility", *Silverkris* August 2003; 57.
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- [6] M. Conlin, "Meditation", 99.
- [7] S. Conner, Can Buddhists transcend mental reservations?, *Science* 22 May 2003;.
- [8] R. Eisler argues in *The Power of Partnership* that this caring for others is central to creating a partnership spirituality—with nature, society, family, and self. "Partnership spirituality is both transcendent and immanent. It informs our day-to-day lives with caring and empathy. It provides ethical and moral standards for partnership relations as alternatives to both lack of ethical standards and the misuse of "morality" to justify oppression and violence." Eisler, *The Power of Partnership*, Novato, New World Library, 2003, 185
- [9] For more on this, see reports and articles at www.metafuture.org and www.ru.org
- [10] For more on this, see P.R. Sarkar, *Neo-Humanism: the Liberation of Intellect*. Calcutta, Ananda Press, 1982.
- [11] <http://www.globalideasbank.org/site/bank/idea.php?ideaId=4302>. Meditation in prisons is explored on this page. Write the authors: "These courses have been the subject of several sociological studies which have concluded that Vipassana has a marked positive impact on behavior and attitude. One very common feeling—the desire for revenge—is noticeably reduced or entirely eliminated when prisoners practice Vipassana. Relations among the prisoners and jail staff become much more harmonious, and self-discipline dramatically improves, decreasing the need for aggressive supervision and punishment by the jail officials." Accessed 9 September 2004, The work of Dr. Kiran Bedi is exemplary.
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