Spirituality for Business Ethics and Sustainability Management

This concluding chapter summarizes the main messages from the book about the promotion of the development of business ethics and sustainability management. One set of messages relates to *research* and addresses how it is possible to incorporate spirituality into business ethics and sustainability management theory. The other set of messages concentrates on *practice* and seeks to find answers to how new working models of ethical business and sustainable economies can be developed and implemented, and how leadership can be transformed to enable ethical and sustainable change.

1 New Insights in Business Ethics and Sustainability

Luk Bouckaert forcefully argues that a spiritual approach to business ethics is badly needed. Without greater intrinsic motivation, business ethics will be reduced to an instrument for reputation and risk management and any genuine moral commitment will be lost. The paradox of business ethics always emerges when ethics is not practiced for its own sake but when it is used to gain material benefit.

The present economic and financial crisis highlights the *paradox of business ethics*: more ethics management does not imply a consistent and integral commitment to ethics when ethics is applied in a selective and market-driven way. Bouckaert shows how, more than with previous scandals, the current financial and debt crisis has revealed the limits of business ethics as a practice of moral self-regulation. Although many of the banks involved in the crisis were committed to CSR programs and had started ethical investment funds, this did not help them to anticipate and avoid it. One can explain this ethical deficit as a lack of business ethics and see the remedy as more business ethics and more CSR programs. But this strategy of 'more of the same' will fail if the efforts made with business ethics are not supported by critical reflection about the mechanisms of selective blindness in business ethics.

For the French philosopher *Henri Bergson* (1932) spiritually-driven leaders play a key role in any dynamic conception of ethics. Bergson criticized the classic Kantian and utilitarian theories that claim to have identified fixed norms for good and evil based on universal, unambiguous principles. According to Bergson, these theories overlook the role and example of moral leaders and pioneers. These individuals create new interpretations of value and are motivated by three things: first, a keen sense of social frustration and crisis; second, an intuitive and meta-rational sense of the "élan vital" (the inner dynamic) of history; and third, the ability to speak to and mobilize people.

Bouckaert suggests that Bergson's propositions can create a link between ethics, spirituality and leadership. While rational management may suffice in periods of stability and shared trust, it does not suffice during times of deep and radical change. The distinction between the 'rational manager' and the 'value-driven leader' can gain philosophical depth in the light of Bergson's theory. If we look at the examples of spirit-driven leaders we find that openness of mind is always guided by an *ethic of compassion* which implies a deep sensitivity to the vulnerability of life and to other people.

Emmanuel Levinas and Hans Jonas developed a notion of responsibility that does not start from the point of view of universal rights and principles, nor from a conceptual representation of the external world but from the contextual experience of the vulnerability of life. For Levinas (1996) the primary sense of responsibility is awakened by an immediate and non-conceptual experience of the vulnerability of other people. This experience of vulnerability may grow into a universal ethic of compassion and responsibility. Hans Jonas (1984) claimed that a sense of responsibility is generated by a 'heuristic of fear'. Confronted with the planetary impact of modern technology and modern lifestyles we should realize that our planet and the lives of future generations are under threat.

Bouckaert believes that a sustainability defined as 'caring for future generations' illustrates that, on the one hand, a spiritual commitment anticipates every declaration of rights (and makes such declarations possible) but, on the other hand, this spiritual commitment must be made tangible by giving people rights and by transforming the

economy according to these rights. Applied to business ethics this means that stakeholder management and business plans must always be preceded by a spiritual commitment to future generations. The awareness that connects us to the common good is the first and most deeply intrinsic incentive which can lead us to set up a social praxis of sustainability in business.

Henrick Opdebeeck emphasizes that combining entrepreneurship with respect for socioenvironmental priorities is not a trivial task. Not only is rationality necessary for this, but also wisdom. Sustainability management questions the basic assumptions of the dominant economic paradigm, such as the need to maximize consumer satisfaction and optimize utility – both of which are grounded on a belief in rational, quantitative progress.

Sustainability management concentrates on economic practices at the micro-level, realizing that on this level one can, through the discovery and exploration of human self-consciousness, combine freedom and order. Consciousness of the self allows man to generate compassion, justice and temperance. Such an outcome is possible only if man's inner or spiritual faculties are not neglected. Sustainability management essentially addresses the individual, small-scale, micro-level. The emergence of concrete sustainable economic alternatives is linked to the development of practical sustainable experiments that stimulate others to turn toward more sustainable practices. The power of example is vital. By extension, and after taking necessary learning cycles into account, such sustainability features can be scaled up to the meso-level (large-scale enterprises with a more human face, for instance) - and macro-level initiatives (like Kyoto and Rio+20).

Opdebeeck states that history has proven that the utopian pre-paradigm offers the opportunity to elaborate crucial aspects of sustainability within a pluralistic context. In the utopian paradigm the essential values required to make sustainability concrete are inspired by *philosophical wisdom* from Greek Antiquity and by *spiritual traditions* like Christianity, Judaism and Islam, not to forget Eastern traditions like Buddhism or Taoism.

Andras Laszlo suggests that turning to examine the *inner perspective* will help achieve a state of sustainability. This is the way of the Sufi, which views life in the light of the essence behind the surface of life. According to Sufism, the human soul is continually seeking to realize its true being and to fulfill its purpose in life. This can be seen not only in each individual's yearning to realize his or her potential to the fullest, but also in our collective unfolding towards the highest expression of human existence. The consciousness of humanity is awakening to the interrelatedness of all life, and this is reflected in a new holistic understanding of the universe.

It is important to make a distinction between innovation and creativity. Changing reality means *innovation*. This requires action by a team, is continuous, takes a long time, and delivers something new to the system. Its impact is measurable and it requires the use of tools and project management. *Creativity*, on the other hand, changes perception and requires thinking and feeling. It represents a challenge to individuals and is discontinuous, taking an instant. Its impact cannot be measured and it requires learning methods fuelled by questions, surprises, and incomplete answers. To be able to create means being able to meet situations in an original and fresh way. Creativity is not about reacting to the environment, or processing it and nor is creativity promoted or even catalyzed by external factors.

Knut Ims investigates the deep ecology approach developed by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess who was inspired by Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism on the one hand, and Aristotle, Spinoza and Heidegger on the other. Næss (1989) argues that we need to distinguish between deep and shallow approaches to environmental problems. Shallow ecology represents a technocratic attitude to pollution control and resource depletion by supporting rules like 'the polluter pays', and by assuming that symptoms can be treated through technological fixes. Such a shallow approach assumes an anthropocentric worldview in which human affluence is vital. As a consequence, levels and patterns of production and consumption are left unchallenged. In contrast, deep ecology assumes a relational, total field perspective that fits into a non-reductionist, non-anthropocentric worldview. The prescribed medicine is to change the basic ideological structure, which ultimately means changing how we as humans regard ourselves. Thus

deep ecology redefines the very notion of self as a subject – and opens it up to transformation into an eco-Self.

Næss' view begins with one basic norm: Self-Realization! This is understood as "Self-realization for all beings!" The self that should be realized is not the ego self but the larger ecological Self. Næss focuses on the human ability to identify with a larger sense of Self. Humans naturally have this capacity. This can be observed as a cross-cultural phenomenon. Supporting the principles of the peace movement is also a part of Næss' philosophy. But Næss stresses that social justice is not enough. We have to produce and consume less – to tread more lightly and more wisely on the Earth. His motto is "Simple in means and rich in ends". This speaks for quality of life instead of standard of living and celebrates the virtues of slowness and smallness in an age of speed and scale.

From a Buddhist point of view *Gabor Kovacs* criticizes Western materialism which has raised human beings 'out' of nature and made them the dominant planetary species. The consequence of having this exclusively anthropocentric worldview is the emergence of a growth-oriented, globalized economy. Consumption-based and greed-driven human lifestyles are resulting in the overuse of the resources of the planet and pollution of the environment to an ever-greater extent. The consequences of these dismal global processes are deforestation, soil degradation, losses of biodiversity, the extinction of species, resource depletion and climate change.

A potential solution is offered by *Buddhist* teachings which deal with suffering and the cessation of suffering. The Buddha's central doctrine, the *Four Noble Truths*, addresses this problem. The First Noble Truth states that the true nature of sentient beings is suffering. The Second Noble Truth asserts that the origin of suffering is widespread unchecked cravings for the ephemeral phenomena of the impermanent world. Misery exists because of our attachment to certain states of impermanent feelings and uncontrolled greed for ephemeral things – especially goods produced by the consumption-based society of our times. The Third Noble Truth declares that suffering can be obviated through the elimination of attachment and greed. This assertion leads to the final truth, The Fourth Noble Truth, which states that the tool for doing this is The

Noble Eightfold Path. This is lifestyle advice which refers to 'right behavior' that leads to the ultimate goal of Buddhists; the overcoming of greed, hatred and delusion, the three root causes of suffering.

The foremost Buddhist virtue in regard to the environment is 'non-harming'. This represents an approach to minimizing impact that prohibits the destruction of life. It does not just refer to the prohibition of certain attitudes, but to the encouragement of active participation in doing good. It means the rejection of violence and the cultivation of the positive values of love and compassion towards all sentient beings. This encompasses preserving biodiversity and being kind to animals. Gratitude towards the non-sentient realm of nature is another important environmental virtue in Buddhism. Forest-groves, trees, mountains, lakes and rivers are objects of reverence for the spirit of gratitude. This infers having the aspiration not to intervene or transform, but to revere and contemplate the intact state of the natural environment.

Kovacs emphasizes that the Buddhist lifestyle is characterized by being content with little, being moderate in daily activity, and practicing simplicity. All of these virtues imply a more sustainable and environmentally-sound livelihood. The realization of these virtues results in the fading of greed and craving and the development of a moderate, frugal way of consuming that has a resounding effect on the quality of nature. In Buddhism, sustainability is not a goal in itself, but a positive byproduct of a virtuous life.

Rita Ghesquière uses examples from literature to demonstrate the connection between sustainability and wisdom. She presents the *fable* as a sustainable good and investigates some fables which foster the idea of sustainability. The fable is a short narrative in prose or verse and contains non-human creatures such as animals, plants or even inanimate objects (mirrors, ink or paper) as protagonists. Fables combine merriness and wisdom. They are fiction but the animal characters act as human beings do. Hence their behavior and their circumstances are experienced by the audience as true-to-life, as an essential part of the experience of life. Anthropomorphism, convincing characters and events and generalizations of practical wisdom are essential components of the fable.

Ghesquière stresses that fables teach us some important lessons. *Labor* (the farmer and his sons), *frugality* (the ants), soberness (the fox) and *productivity* (the lesson of the miser) should come together if we are to overcome the crisis. The steady tenacity of the tortoise will help us to *persevere*. And we should not forget the dream of the moth, which is an excellent guide to *happiness*.

2 Practice and Leadership for Achieving Sustainability

Jean-Paul Close describes a new sustainability venture in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, which takes the form of a new model of a complex society moving toward sustainable progress. He believes that the beginning of the 21st century will enter the history books as a brief but intensely significant period in human history when humankind finally became aware of its spiritual self. This *quantum leap* in human evolution will result in a new, self-aware global human society. Instead of 'having' (possession) and 'taking' (greed) we are learning to 'be' (talent) and to 'give' (create).

The following definition of *sustainable progress* is offered: to work together on an ongoing basis in a healthy, vital, safe and dynamically progressive, self-sufficient human society within the context of the ever-changing natural environment in which we live and act. The complexity of air quality and human health issues provide a direct link to this definition of sustainable progress. One needs to address the four key areas of authority that exist within any society if complexity is going to be tackled. These focal areas are (i) the local population, (ii) the local government, (iii) business enterprises, and (iv) science and education. None of these authorities normally relate to one other in a purpose-driven way, nor take responsibility for such complex co-creative problems. They all function as parts of a chain of economic dependencies and opportunistic money-driven self-interests, each playing some fragmented, consequence-driven, incomplete role in the complex puzzle. Local AIREAS Eindhoven invited them all to take responsibility together in a new-paradigm venture.

The Local AiREAS Eindhoven experience shows that a new form of society can be quickly developed and implemented to foster true sustainable progress in complex societies using powerful instruments from the old paradigm. This process represents an

act of responsibility that challenges old bureaucratic dependencies and structures in a proactive and powerful way. Through voluntarily testing the new society using the stress points of human complexity as it increasingly appears over the coming years, the suffering of major fractions of the human populations may be reduced to the minimum needed for evolution, converting fear into pro-active passion and contributions.

Laurie Michaelis presents the Quakers Society of Friends' response to climate change. Climate change can be seen as a problem that has arisen due to overemphasis, both in government policy and in popular culture, on free market capitalism and competitive individualism. This system has supported the innovation that has created technologies and products that have led to unprecedented improvements in the standard of living of many people in industrialized societies. It has also enabled the concentration of wealth which is often linked to political power, or to positions in the social hierarchy. Hence it has also created considerable vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

The *Living Witness Project* supports a number of Quaker groups in their attempts to experiment with collaborative approaches to sustainable living as a response to climate change. Living Witness has provided workshops for about 200 Quaker groups, thereby supporting them to act and live more sustainably. It maintains a network of 500 or more individual Friends and is involving them with local meetings, biannual national gatherings, summer schools and a variety of printed and Internet resources. At local meetings members are encouraged to work with a Sustainability Toolkit and to report on their greenhouse gas emissions and the actions they are taking to reduce them.

British Quakers have come a long way towards developing a coherent approach to sustainability. There is no single shared narrative about what matters, or what should be done about it, yet many Friends are making significant steps towards living more sustainably and they see this goal as part of their shared identity as Quakers. The Quaker approach is grounded in a spirituality that focuses not so much on the human relationship to nature as on individual relationships with others. Most Friends are conscious of being out of tune with the consumer culture that most of us are deeply infected by. This is reflected in the difficulty most of us have with limiting our own consumption. Quakers are one of the groups that might be expected to be most willing and able to move towards sustainable living. The required shift is happening, but it is contested and it seems to

many of us to be too slow. Perhaps the main hope for humanity is that many examples both of practical initiatives for sustainable living, and of the spiritual and social practices that underpin them, are being developed by Quakers and others.

Aloy Soppe, inspired by the economic ideas of anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, develops propositions to support sustainable finance. Steiner stated that all material objects such as consumer goods, capital goods and services are subject to ageing and therefore intrinsically diminish in quality and value – in contrast to money. Money represents a right to future purchasing power which is of an essentially everlasting quality. This implies that over the course of time money will become 'overvalued' in relation to goods and services. At the same time, interest payments lead to social injustice (in terms of distribution of income) because the quality of material goods and services can only be maintained through labor inputs, while the interest mechanism causes capital to increase in value (sometimes exponentially). This inevitably results in the accumulation of value.

According to Steiner, the accumulated value must be creamed off by means of making gifts from economic actors to the field of culture. If capital is not destroyed voluntarily through gifts from traders then depreciation will occur involuntarily in the form of inflation and bankruptcy. There should therefore be an ongoing system of institutional transfers of value from the economic sector to the cultural sector. Through these gifts capital will acquire a temporary character and will cease to exist if the recipient has consumed it.

Soppe's *first proposition* is that the average interest rate should vary with the rate of growth of the real economy - which is a proxy for organic growth in economic processes. Lower interest rates are not desirable because of their impact on economic opportunities. Higher interest rates should be rejected because of the implicit additional positive time preference that they entail. His *second proposition* concerns the accumulation of wealth. Under the assumption of the existence of a positive interest rate, the absence of a financial tax and the absence of bankruptcies, financial capital grows exponentially and therefore needs to be managed institutionally, in a positive way. A structural imbalance between the monetary sector on the one hand and the real economy on the other leads to the illusion of purchasing power in the hands of the public. The exponential growth of

financial capital needs to be managed institutionally if a state of sustainability is to be achieved.

Arundhati Virmani and François Lépineux investigate Navdanya as a form of spiritual-based entrepreneurship for an alternative food culture in India. Navdanya mobilizes ideas that constitute an ideological frame for political action in India. The movement offers an example of how spiritual values and traditions can be mobilized to create a vision of sustainable agriculture, defend the individual against corporate rights and promote an alternative form of food culture. The multi-level transformational power of Navdanya should also be highlighted: it lays claim to being a catalyst for an economic model based on fairness, a lever for social change and an actor in defense of the common good.

Navdanya's philosophy focuses on peace with nature through *sustainable agriculture* and *organic farming* and *celebrating biodiversity* – symbiotic relationships between plants lead to higher yields – and solidarity economies rather than economies based on competition. It puts forward a holistic view of man's relation to the planet. It affirms that the right to food is a fundamental one, raises awareness of the hazards of using chemical fertilizers and pesticides or genetically modified seeds, and combats bio-piracy and climate change. It defines its goals as organizing and promoting farmers' groups and preserving biological and cultural diversity, as well as battling for seed sovereignty, food sovereignty and water democracy – all themes covered by the slogan 'Earth Democracy'.

Navdanya's philosophy, goals and principles of action have drawn it into partnership with non-Indian movements such as *Slow Food* – an international movement founded in Italy that defends traditional regional cuisine and local economic systems that are committed to creating a future for food and agriculture in which small producers prosper, a culture of ethical consumption develops, and biodiversity and cultural diversity thrives. Navdanya's stand, 'small is beautiful', conforms to the principles of Slow Food. In 2001 Navdanya received the Slow Food Award and became a Slow Food partner – and Navdaya's founder *Vandana Shiva* has served as Vice-President of Slow Food International.

Navdaya can be considered to be a *transformational entrepreneurship*, a form of entrepreneurship that paves the way for – and allows the realization of – the 'great

transition' of the earth system that lies ahead, and one which combines the three perspectives of foresight, global civil society and the common good. Transformational entrepreneurship fosters economic, societal and cultural change towards a global civilization that the planet can sustain, and relies on the mobilization of three levers: (i) Foresight – having a vision of the unfolding of the great transition ahead, of a desirable post-transition state for the world, and linking this to the present; (ii) Global civil society – raising the awareness of the general public at all levels, from the local to the global, about the stakes of the great transition; and (iii) The promotion of the common good – emphasizing the importance of preserving and restoring nature, of promoting global justice, of placing human needs at the heart of economic relations.

Janos Vargha describes how the self-interests of nature transformers are enforced using the example of water construction megaprojects. There are many examples of ambitious big dam projects that have transformed the landscape and the environment – profitable for the 'projectors' but disastrous for others such as local people and natural ecosystems.

The arsenal of the *Club of Projectors* consists of exaggerated or false promises, political pressure, and scapegoating. This list can be extended with more items by examining the activities of projectors from antiquity to current times. Projectors (not only Swift's contemporaries but many others from the previous millennia and the following centuries) frequently ignore negative experiences, or at least do not learn from their mistakes. Accordingly, they make the same errors again and again. History is littered with infamous landmarks left behind by the Club of Projectors: ancient irrigation canals in Mesopotamia that salinified soils and made them infertile; the Corinth Canal in Greece, one of Nero's projects that was completed in the nineteenth century but never yielded the promised benefits; the Grand Canal of Alsace that was abandoned at half its planned length because of its negative impacts (but the part which was ultimately built – from which most of the water of the Rhine comes – caused the groundwater table to drop significantly and large wetland forests to perish); the Aral sea that has almost completely dried out as a consequence of the construction of irrigation canals that deprive its two feeder rivers of water. These are just a few examples from a very long list.

A common and distinctive feature of the majority of such projects is that they are linked to the state and to politics. One main reason for this is that, over a certain size – and

many of these types of water projects belong to the big, mega or giga category –, such projects require extensive periods of construction, not infrequently decades, and this locks up huge financial resources for long periods of time with very uncertain returns. Another major reason is that the projects usually occupy, influence or reduce in value private and/or state properties, provoking stakeholders to actively or passively resist them. In addition, supporters of hydropower projects must strongly compete against other projectors who offer other types of power plants which are cheaper and require less time for construction. Recently, supporters of such projects have also encountered public opposition in the form of environmental groups as more and more knowledge accumulates about the negative ecological impacts of such projects. Promoters, therefore, desperately seek to justify their public subsidies and fight for support from any kinds of political systems.

Vargha offers a (partial) counterexample of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam project on the Danube. Environmental groups lead by the Danube Circle managed to stop the construction of the second barrage in 1989 (which had already started at Nagymaros where the site was surrounded by a coffer dam and the river already diverted into a provisional bed). A few years later the coffer-dam was removed and the river was restored to its original bed. In this section the Danube River again flows freely. Here, the Danube Circle lived up to its goal, encapsulated in the motto of the group borrowed from *Comenius*: "Omnia sponte fluent, absit violentia rebus" (Let everything flow free, violence shall be afar from things).

Nel Hofstra focuses on entrepreneurship models inspired by nature. Eco-innovation refers to the use of ecological knowledge to bring forth ecological progress. Many firms have been developing ecological innovations; mostly products and processes that reduce environment-related costs. However, eco-efficiency does not guarantee environmental effectiveness. Invention and design with a regenerative character create new opportunities for the practice of eco-innovation. Such products and services recognize the interconnectedness and unity of all life, physical as well as spiritual. They acknowledge Nature as both mentor and teacher because they understand the mutual form of the relationship man has with Nature.

The *cradle-to-cradle* concept promotes the use of waste as a resource for manufacturing in the bio and technosphere. 'Bioneers' is a movement that suggests novel ways that forces may be joined to confront and mimic design and innovation in a life-conducive way. Regenerative developments are affirmative contributions to living systems (human and biotic) and present entrepreneurial opportunities. They require constant adaptation and the embedding of growth with a deeper meaning and significance for all involved. This way of thinking will open the way to a completely novel realm for entrepreneurs and will simultaneously awaken us to the magnitude of opportunities, instruction and wonder that our Earth can provide.

Peter Pruzan reveals the paradox of pragmatism in *spiritual-based leadership*. Spiritual-based leaders are nourished by their spirituality, which is a source within them that informs and guides them. They search for meaning, purpose and fulfillment in the external world of business and in the internal world of consciousness and conscience. Their external actions and their internal reflections are mutually supportive so that rationality and spirituality may be seen as mutually supportive perspectives.

Pruzan emphasizes that the evolution of spiritual-based leadership implies not just a transformation of the teaching and the practice of leadership, but also, and more fundamentally, the transformation of the *individual leader's mind-set*. What is required is a consciousness that resonates with the conviction that a precondition for the long-term success of purposeful, organized mercantile activity is spiritual-based leadership and not just the pursuit of material gain. We are faced the challenge of developing vocabularies, perspectives and research methods that can support leadership that is spiritually-based. Instead of having a focus on deliberate and willed action that is considered to be the result of logical generalizations and prescriptive principles, this approach implies focusing on the emancipation and empowerment of inner guidance and embodied knowledge, leading to a shift in consciousness and conscience.

Pruzan – responding to comments by *Joanne B. Ciulla*, *Stephen B. Young*, *Paul de Blot*, *SJ* and *Katalin Illes* – emphasizes that embodied knowledge is the knowledge of the Self, the core essence of our being, where such knowledge resides and is in principle available to all of us, including leaders, as it represents our fundamental nature. However, the skills and the motivation to access such knowledge are often suppressed by the acceptance –

and often the idealization – of the traditional criteria of success that place the emphasis on financial gain. This is why we should focus on aligning leaders' *inner* perspectives towards identity, purpose, responsibility and success. This will in turn reflect on their decisions and actions in the *outer* world of business. The propensity of leaders to embrace the concept and practice of spiritual-based leadership depends on their awareness of their own spirituality. So the relationship between one's own spiritual awareness and one's motivation and ability to promote and practice leadership grounded in one's spirituality is crucial.

At the end of this book I would like to refer once again to *Martin Heidegger*. He once wrote that caring for things demands immanence in God. (Heidegger 1985) The book "The Spiritual Dimension of Business Ethics and Sustainability Management" suggests that we too may try to see the *world* as the *face of God* and organize our business accordingly.

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