

The Conscious Economy

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What is the emerging conscious economy and what are the driving forces today that will shape the multi-dimensional future of exchange, currency, acquisition, and growth? These are just a few of the questions to be considered as we look ahead to the next 15 to 25 years in anticipation of a major shift in human consciousness, global diversity, and the allocation of the earth's resources. Whereas in the past, small elite organizations, political parties, financial institutions, and powerful corporations were able to control the flow of wealth and distribution, the conscious economy will ultimately have the ability to amass global support for justice, equality, and sustainability, while keeping special interest groups accountable to the masses. For the purposes of this article the term "economy" is used to look beyond currency, beyond stock markets, beyond the acquisition of goods, and beyond resource distribution.

The term "conscious economy" is a play on words in some sense particularly designed to identify the fallacy we have created in that all things both seen and unseen are subject to the centrality of economics. When we step back and look at the absurd notion of our established channels of distribution, stock margins, and "cost effective" environmental degradation, we see what can only be dubbed as an "unconscious" economy, in which all actions are based on the bottom line.¹ It is from this observation that I refer to the conscious economy as the transformational alternative to the existing paradigm in which

¹Dator, J. (1993). *Futures Studies and Sustainable Community Development*. Manoa, Hawaii, USA: University of Hawaii.

our entire reality has been defined. This report looks at how this phenomenon is evidenced through the following factors:

- Generational Value Shifts
- Bridging the Divide Between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants
- Eco-nomics 101
- Extreme Makeover™ Currency Addition
- Re-centralized Government
- Natural Selection and the Conscious Economy
- Complexity Theory and the Conscious Economy
- Preparing for the Conscious Economy

Generational Value Shifts

The 2008 economic collapse accelerated the shift from a quantity value to a quality value as Gen Y watched their parent's retirement investment accounts diminish after a lifetime of dedication to an American Dream that, in the end was precisely just that, a dream. Although generational value shifts were identified before the market collapse of 2008, the tsunami of social change did not fully form until after 2008.² With the collapse of the market came the inevitable series of aftershocks that left the masses waiting in unemployment lines, talking heads projecting short term job growth, and a generation of young graduates with nowhere to go in the traditional molds for which their entire education was designed. The value shift was blaringly obvious now that the younger generations had a massive global crisis to reinforce their suspicions of an unsustainable economy, disparate social contract, and

²Littler. (2009). *The Emerging New Workforce*. Littler, Littler Mendelson, P.C.

excessive waste of resources. Linear models of social ladder climbing, whether corporate or political, have transformed into horizontal models of open source collaboration, learning organizations, and global interlocking networks working toward the creation of a more conscious global economy.³

Bridging The Divide Between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

The worldwide web has done far more than simply create a larger market for the sale of goods and services. Again we see the utilization of technology change from the boomers to gen X and Y but the larger implications of the web have not yet been realized. From the standpoint of the “digital immigrant,” the use of social media tools as a legitimate form of meaningful connectivity does not match what they have experienced for most of their lives. “Digital natives” on the other hand have been raised in a world where the idea of connectivity is synonymous with online interaction. You can see this in the way that the older established generation has historically utilized social media tools as compared to the emerging generation. In general the established generation has used these tools primarily as an extension of work in the form of new sales and marketing vehicles, whereas the emerging generation uses these same tools to create virtual platforms to collaborate and engage each other on various issues and interests.⁴

When looking at how these tools are used, you can see the shift in social values and worldview. “Digital natives” do not see a compartmentalized life where work, family, and social interaction are neatly organized into separate spaces. Whereas previous generations developed close physical ties outside of work as a refuge from an environment where relationships were more transactional than personal.⁵ Taking this into account it is

³Green, E. (2010). *Anywhere: how global connectivity is revolutionizing the way we do business*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

⁴Tapscott, D., & Williams, A. D. (2010). *Macrowikinomics*. New York City, NY: Penguin Group.

⁵Daft, R. L. (2005). *The leadership experience*. Canada: Thompson Southwestern.

understandable that “digital immigrants” find the concept of online connection and interaction hard to compare to the traditional idea of a “meaningful” relationship.

In addition to the redefining of meaningful relationships, rapid advancements in cybernetic research, artificial intelligence, robotic factory workers and the like are changing the way many people interact with their environment. On the medical front we see human organs printed on ink jet printers,⁶ organisms being created in laboratories, genetic modification, and nano-technology that may alter our entire concept of risk management and human healthcare.⁷

Eco-nomics 101

Climate change, peak oil, peak freshwater, crumbling ecosystems, peak food, and oceanic decline are a just a few environmental concerns that loom on the horizon.⁸ Co2 emissions are estimated to be a major economic issue affecting every facet of life. What most people fail to realize is that 40% of Co2 emissions come from buildings. The modern day “unconscious economy” wants to continue building unsustainable and highly toxic structures in order to stimulate job growth. The need for commercial space continues to decline which leaves a gaping hole in the commercial real estate market, yet the unconscious continue to build buildings that will be uninhabited.⁹ The “conscious economy” looks toward retrofitting, bio-mimicry, and new technology that counteracts Co2 emissions of modern buildings. Telecommuting is on the rise as the conscious economy does not see work and life as separate but seeks to find a healthy balance among all aspects of life. Environmental impact is now being considered in the stock value of corporations. There is increasing pressure on corporations to use their power to protect the environment

⁶Nusca, A. (2011, June 6). Replacement Human Organs, Thanks to a 3-D Printer. *Smart Planet* .

⁷Tillotson, J.(n.d.).*Scentsory Design: Smart Second Skin*. Retrieved May 25, 2011, from Smart Second Skin Web site: www.smartsecondskin.com/main/scentsorydesign.htm

⁸Elgin, D. (2001). *Promise ahead*. New York: Harper Collins.

instead of exploiting it, with corporations often having difficulty adapting to this new demand.¹⁰

Extreme Makeover: Currency Edition

The economics of the unconscious economy are based on a few key principles. First is the idea that we live in a predictable and somewhat stable environment. The current recession is viewed as a bump in the road, with the belief that everything should go back to normal soon. We see this played out as the U.S. prints more money and fiat currency has no regulator, which is unconsciously justified by an infinite growth paradigm.¹¹ The distribution of wealth is severely imbalanced. The corporation, in which the executive is often compensated at 700% of the entry-level employee's compensation, can be viewed as a microcosm of global finance. The conscious economy aims to redefine the value of the individual by basing identity on the unique contributions a person makes to society as opposed to viewing the human being as producer of goods, labor, etc. This is important to recognize as a future of limited natural resources, global interconnectivity, and high probability of robotic and artificial intelligence supplanting the majority of the modern day workforce will inevitably redefine the social structure and value system of our entire species.¹²

Re-Centralized Government

Both socialist and capitalist ideologies are constructs of the industrial age and have no relevance in the future of politics. These ideologies also operate on the principle of unlimited resources and the conflict over how to acquire, allocate, and profit from an infinite supply. As we see a major shift in focus from society depending on organizations,

⁹Wadley, C. (2011, May 22). saving old buildings creates more jobs than new construction, saves energy, says PlaceEconomics Don Rypkema. *Deseret News* .

¹⁰Dignan, P. (2011, November 22). Environmentally and Socially Responsible Business Practices. *w3w3.com*

¹¹Taleb, N. N. (2010). *The black swan*. New York City, NY: Random House Trader.

¹²Halal, W. E., & Marien, M. (2011, May-June). Global MegaCrisis: four scenarios, two perspectives. *The Futurist* , p. 8.

institutions, and governments to define, regulate, and provide for their wellbeing, the political process will follow suit. Increased attention is being given to the individual's need and desire by every sector of society, such as through target marketing to individual preferences as opposed to group generalities. The political process will also take hold in a more localized fashion. Transparency as a value system will require our "public servants" to truly live up to that title. More activity in local representation and a more collaborative process for addressing the problems and needs of the community should result, taking politics from the theatre to the neighborhood.

Natural Selection and the Conscious Economy

Evolutionary change theory follows key ideas attributed to *Darwin's Origin of Species*. Natural selection, environmental adaptation, punctuated equilibrium, and diversification in "reproductive memes," are just a few characteristics used to describe the evolutionary change process in our society. Major shifts in the definition of "value" have been both affected by and are affecting the social infrastructure at every level. Historical changes in economics, technology, social ideals, and politics present a picture of gradual change where these elements had to adapt primarily to localized shifts. Over the past decade we have seen the rise of invasive technology, disruptive innovation, and neo-networks that have reshaped our view of relationships and professional associations. The accelerated pace of change has caused individuals, organizations, and businesses to question long-trusted methodology, strategy, and planning, all striving toward adaptive and viable properties as new global "environments" are introduced to the local "biosphere."¹³ We may also attribute the stock market crash, the near recent downgrade in U.S. credit rating, increased job shortages, dwindling natural resources, and overpopulation, to a sort of punctuated

equilibrium in which the emerging conscious economy will bring about a new form of stability.¹⁴

If change is a process of evolution and adaptation, then we must assume that an accelerated rate of change will require an accelerated rate of adaptive and resilient characteristics to emerge in every part of the social structure. However, it is highly unlikely that a shift of this magnitude will provide ample time for the majority to adapt, ultimately creating a potential conflict scenario where those individuals, organizations, businesses, and governments that are future-fit, anticipatory, and creative, will thrive while the rest just survive.

Complexity Theory and the Conscious Economy

Evolutionary theory may not be the only way to understand the emergence of a conscious economy. Complexity theory can explain a great deal about what is emerging. It is important to distinguish the difference in “complicated” and “complex” systems or environments. Although much of what we see in the emerging conscious economy is comparatively complicated to what we have traditionally seen as a stable environment, the surface level changes are not complex. Complexity theory looks to fractal properties in nature that reveal a network of parts which are systems in and of themselves, working in conjunction with other parts that create a whole system, which as you may have guessed is also a separate part working within the context of an even larger system.¹⁵ Characteristics of the conscious economy mimic complex relationships found in nature through collaboration, diversification, shared mutual benefit and destruction, creativity, and unpredictability.¹⁶ The explosive growth in technology allows real-time information exchange and organization to occur at seemingly random intervals introducing new

¹³The Economist. (2008). *Risk 2018: planning for an unpredictable decade*. The Economist.

¹⁴Hollings, C. (2001). Understanding the Complexity of Economic, Ecological, and Social Systems. *Ecosystems* , 390-405.

¹⁵Wolfram, S. (1988). *Complex Systems Theory*. Retrieved from Stephen Wolframs Website: www.stephenwolfram.com

¹⁶Barker, J. (Writer), & Barker, J. (Director). *Wealth and Innovation* [Motion Picture]

emerging systems within existing systems, creating a vibrant and diversified social “meme pool.” If social change is a complex system of individual systems in co-operation, then we must assume that our environment has never been stable, and therefore, adaptability in a complex environment requires a complete paradigm shift in the way we view our past, present, and the uncertain future.

Preparing For the Conscious Economy

Although the emerging conscious economy can be seen as both evolutionary and complex, key differences in these theories would create alternative future outcomes. If the conscious economy is simply the next stage on humanity’s social evolutionary path, then we will have to reconcile the “oneness” of humanity with the reality that our world currently lacks the capacity to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. On the other hand, if the conscious economy is the result of humanity finally reaching a complex global stage of mutual destruction and benefit, an accelerated diffusion of innovation will likely occur as old ideas and limitations no longer impede a symbiotic social structure. Whether you believe that we are evolving toward a conscious economy or accelerating toward the realization that our world is a complex network of systems within systems, it is important to re-think our modern day concepts and how those concepts shape our view of the future and ultimately the action we take in the present. As you consider the conscious economy and your role in the creating opportunity for yourself, your organization, or the community in which you reside remember the following:

Jobs Are Part of the "Anywhere" Economy

The future of work and the definition of “job” will drastically change in the conscious economy. It is estimated that in the next 10 to 15 years the vast majority of the workforce

will be telecommuting or working remotely.¹⁷ Before we get to that stage we must redefine what future jobs will look like, the market sector they will serve, and whether corporate employment will be replaced by self-employment.

Re-Think Everything: Trans-formation over re-formation

Transformative thinking requires seeing local economic development in a global and virtual context. Our current standard of economic development is intrinsically tied to the attraction and retention of corporations to invest in local job creation. Local communities must re-think their current infrastructure at every level in order to attract new markets and find their niche within a global context. The key here is the collaborative effort of the entire community to reshape itself as a global leader in innovation.¹⁸

Maintain Generational Relevance

Rapid changes in technology have significantly separated the Baby Boomers from Generation-Y. Individuals and organizations alike must bridge these divides through unilateral apprenticeship, constructive non-ideological dialogue, and most of all, in a spirit of humility by recognizing the unique strengths they each bring to the table.

Long-Term Viability

Old world beliefs are highly based on projections and assumptions trapped within the context of an infinite growth paradigm. Economics in the old paradigm is top down, transactional, and control-oriented over intellectual property. Old models in the infinite growth paradigm factor success only on short term gains and perceptions of success. The new model of collaboration relies heavily on principles of transparency, honesty, and finite growth principles.

¹⁷Walsh, D. (2011, February 17). *How Telecommuting Lets Workers Mobilize for Sustainability*. Retrieved from Green Biz Website: www.greenbiz.com

¹⁸Inayatullah, S. (n.d.). *Why City Futures?* Retrieved from Metafuture Website: www.metafuture.org

Organizations, businesses, and communities of the future must develop an economic plan that emphasizes research and development, complex thinking, and problem solving, which in turn will allow for them to bare the mark of excellence in a competitive global market.