

**Editorial**

**The role of the  
ethical entrepreneur  
as change catalyst**



## Bronwen Rees

Bronwen Rees is Director of the Centre for Transformational Management, Ashcroft International Business School.

**It is clear that we are at a point of crisis and transformation. In her introduction to the articles of this issue, Bronwen Rees suggests that not only will we need to challenge basic assumptions in science, but that the committed action of ethical entrepreneurs is required for real change to take place.**

**T**HROUGHOUT the last six issues of *Interconnections*, we have been predicting and tracking the effects of the crisis of 2008 across the globe, and UK institutions. What has emerged most

clearly has been the need for a deeper understanding of the co-emergent relationship between individuals and the institutions that they create. We have cited several examples where such a shift in the minds of both individuals and groups has created new forms of sustainable

businesses and structures, or new ways of being and acting within extant structures. What this has shown is that only when the actions and mindsets of people within institutions change, will the institutions change. Thus if one person changes within a structure, then that impacts the rest of the structure. If this is to be of benefit, then that change needs to be conscious and directed both to the good of the individual and the group in which he or she is acting. Thus, there needs to be value attached to a person's action both in relationship to the individual *and* his/her group in order for positive change to take place.

Many of the writers in this issue argue that the systems that we have created as a society, and as a global network, are letting us down, leading us on a path of economic and ecological destruction. These systems have disenfranchised many of us, in that some don't work, and others do not provide us with what we need. In the face of this, both employees and consumers are left struggling in a quagmire of confusion, trying to get basic needs met in systems that do not deliver.

This feels more like the end of the trajectory of a process of constant growth without thought of whether this is best for society, our species and the planet. The reason for this is that our systems have become so complex that they interact at multiple places, meaning that decisions are made about one part of the system, without recourse to the overall picture. So, both as employees and consumers, the need for thought about the bigger picture has been taken away, and subsumed into abstract systemic processes, or directed by clever marketing experts who create global desire for more and more material ‘stuff’. Whilst the overall consideration in practically everything we do, is ‘more profit’, or ‘how much does this cost?’

the social, ethical and indeed human considerations get lost. We all know the frustration of being shunted around numerous call centres to get answers to questions, when the person at the other end cannot deviate from their script. It used to be much quicker simply to drive to the bank and get the answer direct.

That is no longer possible, and is creating enormous tension, as it takes away a basic human right – directly to take action and solve a problem. In addition, it also takes away the creative input that each individual can make to the whole. So the system begins to breakdown, as we are witnessing day by day.

But this is not a matter of ideology, nor some Orwellian nightmare. There are some discoveries being made in different disciplines that point to the possibilities of a new reality, one in which we can feel empowered, alive, and creative. If we take an analogy from the new science of living systems, then those systems (or organisms) which can grow and evolve follow a principle of ‘autopoiesis’ – that is they regulate themselves by feedback systems. Within any living system, the components participate in the production or transformation of other parts of the system. In this way, the system continually ‘makes itself’ (Capra, 1997). Not only that, but in new evolutionary theory, each of these ‘organisms’ or ‘holons’ exist within a nested hierarchy of other systems, to create the greater whole. Each molecule, each animal, every human, co-emerges with the environment, the family, the group and the nation, evolving coterminously within

*‘What is needed, is to find ways of evolving the dying organism into something that more consciously interacts with the environment.’*

multi-levelled systems. In this radical worldview, the universe, and memory is a set of habits that have evolved over billions of years. These habits constantly inform our thinking and behaviour through the resonance of so-called ‘morphic fields’ (Sheldrake, 1989). They provide us with information all the time that directs our behaviour to the survival of the whole.

### **Evolving into conscious relationship**

Our current economic and organisational systems, and ways of thinking are hierarchical, with a mindset that still maintains that the human being sits at the top of a meaningless, abstract and frightening universe where Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ is the key to life. This is the philosophy that underpins the fetish with growth that has led to the current crisis where competition is the motivation for most of the businesses that exist today, and in which we train business students. Individuals within the system are limited to the directions that come down from the ‘head’ of the system, and not encouraged to listen to the multifarious information within the morphic fields. Since this is the basis for action within organisations, then individuals cannot work creatively and provide the feedback mechanisms that are needed for the system to recreate itself. It is thus breaking down all around.

How can we find ways of evolving the dying organism into something that more consciously interacts with the environment? Individuals within the system need to rediscover ways of listening to the constant information coming from the morphic fields so that rather than habitually repeating patterns of behaviour which appear to be leading to disaster, they can break through those which are no longer helpful, and evolve into something different. Breaking any habit is always difficult (which is why there are so

*‘Breaking any habit is always difficult (which is why there are so few pioneers), as it involves moving into a place of the unknown which can feel like a process of dying and rebirth.’*

few pioneers), as it involves moving into a place of the unknown, which can feel like a process of dying and rebirth. However, in the new evolutionary theory of morphic fields, once one or two people have done it, then it becomes much easier for the rest! Just like those of us old enough to remember Roger Bannister and the first four-minute mile, a miracle in its time, but now repeated thousands of times by the athletes who followed him.

### **The new pioneers: ethical entrepreneurs**

So, if our systems are to evolve in a positive direction, then it will require pioneers who are willing to take risks with their own responses to conditions, and break through their own conditioned behaviour. The first step that such a pioneer would take would be to look deeply into the inner and outer conditions and to challenge the jaded or non-existent feedback mechanisms. This needs an ethical approach, in that it is an approach that takes into account the broader picture and the individuals within it. It also requires risk-takers, taking steps into the unknown. We could call such an ethical pioneer an ethical entrepreneur, and this forms the backbone of this issue of *Interconnections*. If an entrepreneur is one who takes risks, creates and innovates, and if they are acting from a point of view of ethics, considered as the good of the greatest, then it is possible that action that comes from this perspective can lead to positive and creative regeneration, and thereby change the system. This is slightly different from the notion of the social entrepreneur, who may or may not be driven by the desire to change the system, but who will take risks in his or her business in order to create profit both for him or herself, and contribute to social change at the same time.

### **From the old to the new**

In this issue, some articles highlight the critical and urgent need for such new approaches, others are written by those who are currently already directly taking action and witnessing the feedback mechanism in their successes. Such people, through their critique and/or their action, are finding new ways of breaking through, or highlighting the consequences of actions if individuals remain in this passive type state. They point to the evolution of a new future, one that could be said to be alive, and by this definition 'sustainable'.

In the opening article, Antony Bryant and Michael Lewis enter into a dialogue on the nature of social and ethical entrepreneurship followed by Peter Hayler of Cambridge University who discusses the pastoral entrepreneur. Joel Magnuson concludes this section with a review of current attitudes to 'greening', and a warning that we cannot have change both ways. He suggests that we are fooling ourselves if we consider that there could be a win/win situation where we do not change our habits.

In the ‘Views from the field’ section, Ed Bentham discusses his work at the Atlantic Whale Foundation (AWF), and developing young people to become pioneers themselves, by providing them with opportunities for both thinking and doing. In the second article, Bronwen Rees interviews Tim Jones and Martin Clark

*“It would only be in the context of a truly multi-levelled dialogue combined with deep reflection and action that their pioneering understandings can be truly embraced.”*

at Allia about the charitable bond, and its implications for change at macro-economic, and social level. In the ‘Research and practice’ section and as a prelude to our next issue on education, Richard House analyses the effects of consumer capitalism on children – something which is becoming increasingly urgent as an issue. He also indicates the end of the line for a system which does not take responsibility for the future through its thoughtless marketing where the imperative for growth overcomes care for our future. Michael Lewis, Chief Executive of

the London Children’s Practice, offers his response. As an endpiece, Aled Jones discusses issues of sustainability, and the mission of the new Global Sustainability Unit at Anglia Ruskin University.



AWF project based in Vietnam.

What this issue is pointing to is how our actions have become split off from theory such that a radical reevaluation of our current ways of thinking, social structures, and actions needs to take place if we are to face the current crisis head on. Whilst in their individual disciplines visionaries such as Steiner, Schumpeter and Schumacher



Future ethical entrepreneurs learning the trade with the AWF.

have pointed a way forward, now is the time when their words can be more fully heard. It would only be in the context of a truly multi-levelled dialogue combined with deep reflection and action that their pioneering understandings can be truly embraced. This means questioning disciplinary and individual assumptions. Kuhn's work on paradigms noted the cataclysmic shifts that happened in science. They only occur when fundamental assumptions are challenged. These shifts are happening in all the scientific and humanistic disciplines, and within religious and spiritual groups, but these discoveries as yet remain split off from one another, so that it is difficult to see and acknowledge the seismic nature of this movement. Only when the former silos and their institutionalism are broken down far enough, can a flow of new information lead to growth and life of a different type than that historically offered by the cycles of capitalism. Whether capitalism unfolds into another creative cycle is in the laps of the gods, but we can all make our individual contributions towards a peaceful evolution of the systems that are showing so many signs of decay. We hope this issue interconnects these changes and levels of change to give you some ideas and pointers for both thought and action, whether you be part of an organisation, in academia, or taking risks as an entrepreneur.

#### References

- Capra, F (1997) *The Web of Life*, Flamingo: London
- Sheldrake, R.(1988) *The Presence of the Past*, HarperCollins: London