

From quantitative to qualitative: a mind-changing revolution

*It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else,
that prevents us from living freely and nobly.* HENRY DAVID THOREAU
US Transcendentalist author (1817–1862)

*If you spend your time thinking that the most important objective of
public policy is to get growth up from 1.9 per cent to 2 per cent and
even better 2.1 per cent we're pursuing a sort of false god there. We're
pursuing it first of all because if we accept that, we will do things to
the climate that will be harmful, but also because all the evidence
shows that beyond the sort of standard of living which Britain has
now achieved, extra growth does not automatically translate into
human welfare and happiness.*

LORD ADAIR TURNER
Chair of the UK Financial Services Authority

*Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite
world is either a madman or an economist.*

KENNETH E. BOULDING
Economist and co-founder of
General Systems Theory



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Bronwen Rees proposes some fundamental differences in assumptions between old and new paradigms and argues that the preoccupation with growth characteristic of a materialist view is what has brought about our current crisis.

The global economy is created and dominated by the underlying principles and worldview of a Western scientific paradigm. This means that we consider that the world outside of our experience can be looked at, measured, objectified, reduced to its smallest component parts. This is a materialistic view. It assumes that human beings want to possess objects in order to improve their experience of life. In order to possess these objects, the human being needs money, which has a quantitative exchange value. Economies were initially built on trade, where an exchange had a 'qualitative' value (I will give you one chicken, for your bag of flour, for example). However, now, throughout the globe, most of what we buy, including services for our health and well-being, is mediated through paper money, or numerical transactions on the computer. Possession of money also yields status, power, and (before the economic crash) security. Underpinning the economic materialist and capitalist view, is that of growth fuelled by competition. If an economy becomes powerful, then it moves outside of its regional or national boundaries, and dominates by the power of money, and by the technological weaponry that money has allowed it to build. The more an economy grows, the more power an economy gains, and the more its inhabitants can possess. This wealth is more and more unequally distributed throughout the globe and within nations.

Growth fuelled by competition forms the underpinning of what we understand by mainstream economics. Anything to do with the discipline of mainstream economics is based on a 'Rational' man [sic] who, quite obviously, would seek more possessions and more power, if the benefits exceeded the costs. Each nation state creates institutions which are also built on this view. Our social, political and health institutions are dominated by this economic model perpetuated by management practices built upon these assumptions. The last 30 years or so of management growth has witnessed the

increasing use of a jargon such as: 'strategic planning'; 'organisational change'; 'performance management'; 'competences'; 'human resource management' which measure and count these abstract concepts, and then allocate monetary value to them. These have been introduced by swarms of management consultants, and these policies are also measured by money. Even liberal or radical change programmes which announce great change, are also dedicated to further growth.

This growth is supposedly achieved through a linear series of steps that people or groups can take, with each of the stages mapped out for up to five years or so. (Although these days, projects are reduced to periods of 6 months.) Human resources are measured, and their goals and jobs set out well in advance. Appraisals measure and ensure that this collective growth happens. The dominance of the English language, and its former Imperial heritage, means that this model is now adopted all over the world, and every year thousands of students criss-cross the globe in search of English/American business qualifications that will ensure that they can make this model work in their own countries, in order to grow their own economies.

However, qualitative evidence from our senses suggests that this is not necessarily beneficial. Chaos reigns in formerly 'rational organisations' as the pressurised cauldron that is the world economy teeters under a downward trajectory that seems unstoppable. The figures on the computers no longer bear any resemblance to the material world that it is supposed to represent. Public policy is shaped by a media discourse and government reports which allocates 'billions' and 'trillions' to activities such as health or education for example. It is unclear just who is benefiting from the growth to which our economic models aspire. In the UK, even members of the Royal family have been besieged by rioting students called upon to contribute 'thousands' for their own education.

Unfortunately, whilst this materialist view could hold true in 19th century, we have reached the 'tipping point' collectively where the costs of possessions and hence power are far outweighing the benefits. Whilst some economists and environmentalists are pointing out this at a systemic level, it is a different matter for organisations and individuals, operating in their own local environment to see this problem at the higher level.

Interestingly, the materialist view is being challenged in science.

“Chaos reigns in formerly ‘rational organisations’ as the pressurised cauldron that is the world economy teeters under a downward trajectory that seems unstoppable.”

As I write a group of physicists in Geneva are manipulating powerful energies in a huge tunnel that surrounds the city, in an attempt to find the smallest piece of 'matter' which has escaped them. Several of these physicists talk with the same enthusiasm about their work as the former old alchemists in their search for the 'philosopher's stone'. The understandings of the alchemists were ridiculed and later destroyed by the early proponents of what was to become the Western scientific method. Ironically, the first proponent of this, Newton, was also the last of the great alchemists. However, alchemists were not simply interested, as the myth goes, in changing base metal into gold. As the psychologist Jung pointed out, alchemists were interested in the relationship between mind and matter. By engaging in a process of reflection, it was felt that their minds would also be changed. For the alchemists, mind/matter existed on a single continuum. It was a mystery, but they knew that their practices and processes could lead to the most inspiring insights, into themselves, and the world they lived in. They were changed by the process. Mind influences matter, matter influences mind. Here, there was a direct and observable process taking place between activity and outcome. It is just such a process that is lacking between the billions and trillions talked about in the media, and the essential services that these are supposed to deliver.

The reason that this has got out of control is that in the materialist view, there is a perceived break between the inner world and the outer world. In this view the rational mind, measures, through the constructs of time and space, the world outside. In this paradigm, we ignore the effect that our actions have on the environment, and vice versa. Thus there is an unexamined and incorrect, assumption that mind energy is of the same *quality* as the energy of matter. This means that economists can glibly talk about billions and trillions of pounds or dollars *as though* this has some meaning; newscasters talk about reform, economies, policies costing certain amounts of money, which actually we cannot possibly measure or conceptualise in the actual energy of matter, or action – not in real time. For example, if we were to measure 'billions' in term of time, this is the equivalent to 11 days; a trillion is the equivalent of 33 years. So, there is a collective articulation through these numbers, of a reality that simply does not exist, or rather is impossible to visualise, touch or feel. We can make some intelligent and reasoned calculations of this, but we cannot predict or plan the future in the

way that these numbers imply. To go back again to the wisdom of the ancients and to different cultures – here numbers are simply not just linear – they too have qualities. Two has a different resonance to the number 3. The alchemists were familiar with this. From 1 plus 1 came 2, and from this a ‘third’ arose. This ‘third’ has a different quality from both 1 and 2. It has a resonance, that transcends the first two. The great thinker Fritjof Capra has been articulating the implications of this in finding a conceptual framework for economically sound, ecologically sustainable and socially just solutions for the current crisis (Capra and Henderson, 2009). For him, the move from quantitative to qualitative is critical.

This understanding has been utilised in modern psychology, where some psychotherapists listen to the ‘third’ that arises in the field of interaction between the therapist and client. When this ‘third’ area of understanding arrives, then both the therapist, and the client come into a deeper relationship, and it becomes possible for healing to take place, as a change takes place.

Thus, in a non-materialist view, actions are determined not by quantity, but by the *quality* of attention that is paid to any transaction or relationship. Economics, in its attempts to measure everything quantitatively, has reduced human relationship to more and more of ... nothing. In the therapeutic, or alchemical relationship of mind and matter, the point of inquiry is experience, and feeling. There is a different richness here, that has long been omitted from the corridors of power, which have perpetuated their theory of growth on the assumption that Man [sic] seeks more and more to possess, and this way he will become happy. The mechanisms of communication and indeed survival have been created and dominated by this view, such that throughout the globe a certain paradigm has been created that has perpetuated this suffocation of relationship. New technology, for all its power, encourages a largely superficial mode of communication that merely perpetuates this consumerist view, clearly manifest in social networking such as Twitter, Facebook, and the cult of celebrity.

The great visionary, Schumacher wrote, ‘Everywhere people ask: What can I actually do? The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can, each of us, work to put our inner house in order. The guidance we need for this work cannot be found in science or technology, the value of which utterly depends on the ends they serve; but it can still be found in the traditional wisdom of mankind.’ (p. 318).

‘Further, even though the world is in economic and environmental crisis, perhaps the shift that is needed may not take very much. The natural urge to connect and relate is arising in many different areas throughout the globe, and everywhere, people are understanding that ‘back to basics’ is back to a richness of experience that has long been denied us.’

In a new paradigm, we can question the dichotomy between mind and matter, and begin to ask questions of our own existence and the quality of our relationships. Further, even though the world is in economic and environmental crisis, perhaps the shift that is needed may not take very much. The natural urge to relate is arising in many different areas throughout the globe, and everywhere, people are understanding that ‘back to basics’ is back to a richness of experience that has long been denied us. Models of sustainable community are arising in different parts of the globe, and gradually these are making their way into the business schools (Nowakowski, 2010), as is an increasing emphasis on the importance and indeed ‘energy’ of our emotional life (Arkell, 2008).

It is surely a task of our university systems, if they are to expand the minds of our youngsters, to begin to question the scientific method as being the sole arbiter of our fates, and to introduce newer and deeper modes of inquiry. In my work at the East West Sanctuary, and at the Centre for Transformational Management Practice, I am calling this holonomic inquiry, and this includes a question into the nature of how we view the universe, alongside more traditional research techniques. This way, we inquire into a third transcendent possibility, and how this is created/brought into being by a coming together of two differently bounded entities – be these two humans, groups, observer and observed. For this, we draw upon the wisdom of the ancients, and the, as yet not fully acknowledged or explored work of Jung, in particular his work on synchronicity, and his understanding of relationships that are based on conditionality and not causality, and the findings of the new physicists such as Bohm who posit a new type of reality, where energy is enfolded into matter, and matter into energy.

Whilst it may feel impossible to move on economics within this different paradigm – I believe it is an important task to help create some maps and practices that can feed into institutions, empowering people within them to work differently – moving from a fear-base, which is inherently restrictive, to one of possibility, which is inherently expansive. We will discover that in this expansive universe – there is room for everyone – and not as mainstream economics has assumed and perpetuated, a crushing life-threatening struggle for growth in a world of shrinking resources.

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