

Editorial

Wisdom at work: capitalism in transition

Bronwen Rees



AS the financial crisis deepens, political instability increases, and environmental danger signals are growing, government, education and business are struggling to find pathways that can support an ever-growing population. This issue of *Interconnections*, in keeping with the Academy of Management in 2013 examines the bases of our current ways of working and structuring our societies, and how they may need to evolve in order to survive. It provides an intellectual analysis and practical commentary on the conditions that are arising and the solutions that are emerging. In this vein, it is beginning to articulate the potential tools and methods that people are developing to evolve into a different mode of conducting business and communication on this fragile planet.

One of the problems that has led to our current crisis is the view that an organisation or political structure exists outside of the people that live in it. This leads to a blame culture – ‘that’s not my fault’, and a fall out or polarisation of views between ‘them’ and ‘us’. It is either management’s fault, or the fault of the larger system, leaving everyone apparently powerless to act. In such a culture, accountability and responsibility become very confused – and we can see the results of this in the various inquiries into the institutions of government, media and police that are current in the UK. Whilst there is clearly a need for such inquiries, it would be much better if these were instigated earlier in the process, and in the light of mutual communication and exploration of what is happening, rather than blame and punishment.

What this needs is an acknowledgement that there is a problem, how it has arisen, and how it may be changed. However, there is a level of denial by those who currently still benefit from how things were, leading to chaos and confusion on the ground. We only have to hear about the struggles in the National Health Service, one of the largest employers in Europe to see that there is a problem. What we don’t

understand is that we are all part of the problem – those of us battling away at the front end, and those in the rooms at the back working on the planning, strategy and implementation. What is required, as many of these issues have suggested is a radical change in our ways of doing things, understanding one another and in our leadership.

This issue of *Interconnections* brings together an exciting array of thinkers and leaders who are out on the battlements seeking both to analyse the mistakes of the past, and forge a way ahead. They all have one aim – to break through the traditional paths that are no longer working, and be part of a movement that is evolving more conscious structures that can support a planet that is running out of resources. Their thinking and action is focussed on growth, not for its own sake, but in a sustainable and collaborative manner – and in that growth lie the seeds of a different worldview which is slowly emerging from the chaos.

Key to this work is a return to some of the insights and practices of the ancient wisdom traditions – not in regressive way, but in a way in which such wisdom becomes enfolded within the newer forms – bringing back questions of ethics, personal development and community into our workplaces, which have sadly lacked this under older hierarchical forms which are formed solely for the purposes of the shareholders.

In the ‘Ivory Tower’ section, Mike Townsend points towards emergent forms of capitalism that encourage the engagement of the resourcefulness and flexibility of the human being. Joel Magnuson and John Nirenberg, both invited to the UN Conference of Happiness last year, examine the issues that were paramount here. Against a backdrop of an on-going banking crisis, Richard Higginson and Tarek El Diwany outline the evolving attitudes of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to ‘usury’ – more commonly known as lending money for interest – more importantly the foundation of the current capitalist system.

In the ‘Field’, Rich Fernandez discusses how he introduced wisdom practices into both Google and Ebay, and how they can penetrate and shape already high-performing companies. Attila Vegh, Chief Executive of Cambridge and Peterborough Foundation Trust, drawing on his training both as a medical doctor and as executive as McKinseys explores how to design organisations that can deliver the most effective healthcare. Mark Fowler then describes some of the principles of transformational change.

In the Research and Practice section, Bronwen Rees explores the growing importance of wisdom practices as emerging from the Academy of Management last year, and the real opening to self-examination in the major theme for this year – ‘Capitalism in Question’. Finally Peter Merry outlines the need for energetic stewardship as leadership, and what this means for organisations looking for sustainable growth and emergence.

Section 1

Views from the ivory tower

Michael Townsend explores the **opportunities for change** in the current capitalist system. John Nirenberg and Joel Magnuson discuss their roles at the United Nations conference on **Gross National Happiness**. Richard Higginson and Tarek El Diwany look at the moral elements of the **notion of interest**, and its impact on the banking system.