

SIX DIMENSIONS OF A SUSTAINABLE CONSCIOUSNESS

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So far there is no indication that any of the challenges previously chronicled here has abated. In fact, some of the trends are growing even faster than was predicted a few years ago. Whatever outcomes we realize, it is clear that the future quality of life on the planet will be dictated by human behavior (which is driven by human thought). In other words, *we don't have any choice about whether or not we will have a role in creating whatever future we experience. Our only choice is in whether to create the future consciously or unconsciously!*

THE PREVAILING MINDSET IN ORGANIZATIONS TODAY

Over the past several years, I have regularly asked people in my workshops to brainstorm what they experience as the prevailing mindset in their organizations. After collecting dozens of these lists and sorting the items into themes, I have found that most of the items brainstormed fall *near the left extreme* of the six dimensions portrayed in Table One. I don't think that these six dimensions provide a complete description of the consciousness needed for a truly sustainable future by any means, but they certainly give us a running start at it.

There has been a unanimous response in every one of my workshops that the present default mindset in businesses is located at or near the left end of these dimensions, with a rather narrow "zone of comfort" around each. When asked what sort of scenario we'll create in 30 years, if these defaults continue unchanged, the responses are always gloomy. When asked if these default mindsets are driving the major ecological and economic challenges that presently prevail around the world, there is a unanimous "Yes!"

What would happen if we were able to shift the defaults significantly to the right, and generate wider "zones of comfort?" Wouldn't we be better able to create the kind of future we really want? For that matter, wouldn't we also be able to bring our own lives into better balance today if we made these changes?

Short Term	_____	Long Term
	<i>Time Orientation</i>	
Reactive	_____	Creative
	<i>Focus of Responsiveness</i>	
Local	_____	Global
	<i>Focus of Attention</i>	
Separation	_____	Systems
	<i>Prevailing Logic</i>	
Blaming	_____	Learning
	<i>Problem Consideration</i>	
Doing/Having	_____	Being
	<i>Life Orientation</i>	

Table One
Six Key dimensions of a Sustainable Consciousness

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The challenge in this is that our mindsets have a way of protecting themselves from change, and usually operate like an "autopilot." As far as we know, we are the only species on Earth that has the capacity to think about *how* we think. Most of the time, however, we don't engage this capacity. We reinforce our outlooks on life by repeating the same thoughts day after day. In order to take responsibility we must move "from autopilot to choice." We have done a reasonably good job of preparing for the future technologically. We still have a long way to go psychologically and emotionally.

With conscious choice, one's mindset can become more versatile (that is, more appropriately flexible). **Versatility in consciousness** is a key ingredient that needs to be introduced into the educational process at all levels if we are to address the rising worldwide challenges effectively. *I believe that versatility in consciousness is essential for on-going individual learning and that the only sustainable consciousness is a continual-learning consciousness.*

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Table Two provides examples of how to reinforce or bring attention to the left side of each dimension. Table Three provides examples of how to reinforce or bring attention to the right side of each dimension. These two tables also indicate both the positive aspects of each focus and the liability that accrues from too much of each focus.

Individuals can work with these two tables (especially with Table Three, which is likely to be less familiar), as a part of their personal planning or self-directed personal development work, to increase their versatility of thinking. For example, suppose that you find that you have a strong attachment to Reactive and Short-Term thinking (e.g. too much "fire fighting" and focusing on immediate pressures), and conclude that this focus is not serving you well. To build versatility of focus, you can practice asking the questions and looking for opportunities to reframe situations that bring your awareness to the Creative and Long Term ends of these dimensions (e.g. "What kind of outlook would I create for myself if I had a magic wand?"). With regular practice at shifting your awareness back and forth along any of the dimensions, you'll find that your repertoire for dealing with life will increase dramatically.

Likewise, corporate groups can use these two tables as templates for planning and decision-making. In my experience, when businesses find that they must undergo significant transformations to survive in their rapidly changing marketplace, they usually approach this task in a "get it over with as quick as we can, with as little effort as possible" mentality that is reflective of "left-end thinking." As a result, over 80% of large-scale organizational transformational efforts fail, as the change effort devolves into implementing a few initiatives that don't end up changing the overall situation.

In order to be successful, "right end" thinking is necessary in order to address all of the intricate people dynamics and extensive interdependencies that pervade contemporary organizations. I would argue that the mindsets (and subsequent behaviors) of corporate leaders and employees are among the most critical success (or failure) factors in relation to transformational change. Therefore, Table Three is suggested as a tool to assist in the planning of large-scale organizational change.

In addition, any organization interested in the dual (or triple) bottom line concept will find these two tables to be a valuable resource. In order to establish a high quality environment internally and a sustainable approach externally, "right end" thinking will be necessary.

With greater awareness of what our default positions are, we can make conscious choices about **HOW** to think. The issue is not in having or not having the "correct" default settings, but in being aware of them and choosing other ways of responding that may be more appropriate to the situation. Each end of each dimension has pluses and liabilities, as outlined above.

One of the best ways to promote versatility (expanded zones of comfort in our mindsets) is to ask ourselves questions regularly which will take our mindsets to more distant parts of each continuum. I think that questions such as those suggested above need to be embedded in our educational processes from the very earliest years.

In summary, we have the means to create just about any future we desire. We also have the means to bring an end to life on Earth. We know what is contributing to the interacting web of global challenges, and we have the means to deal with these challenges.

Focus	Messages that Reinforce This Focus	Questions to Bring Focus Here	The Positive Value of Focusing Here	The Result of Overuse of This Focus
Short Term	Don't fix it if it ain't broke. Just do it.	What needs attention now? What are your immediate priorities?	Establishing priorities Acting with efficiency	Lose the big picture. Overlook long term consequences. Put bandages on symptoms.
Reactive	Do as you're told. If it feels good, do it. Life's a bitch and then you die.	What is the established policy, procedure, or practice? What has been done before in this kind of situation?	Consistency Responsiveness Loyalty	Stuck in a rut Unable to flow with change
Local	Look out for "number one." You've got to expect that from a _____!	What makes you different or unique? What is special about this situation?	Survival protection maintaining position	Loss of perspective Ethnocentrism Loss of diversity
Separation	The best way to understand it is to take it apart. A place for everything, and everything in its place.	What are the relevant facts in this situation? What do you get when you "crunch the numbers?"	Convergence Specialization Rationality	Fragmentation Low synergy Get lost in minutiae.
Blaming	It's not my fault! All right, who's to blame here?	What are your reasons for your actions? What's wrong with this picture?	Judgment, law and rule enforcement	Win-Lose polarization Risk aversion
Doing/Having	What's in it for me? Faster, cheaper, better!	What is the most cost-effective thing to do? What's the bottom line?	Financial performance and material comforts	Attachment. to possessions Loss of human sensitivity Burnout

Table Two
Working With the Left Side Focuses

Focus	Messages that Reinforce This Focus	Questions to Bring Focus Here	The Positive Value of Focusing Here	The Result of Overuse of This Focus
Long Term	Create a vision. Plan ahead.	What do you anticipate? Where are we headed? Where do we want to go?	Anticipation Prediction Possibilities contingencies	Lose timely responsiveness Ignore pressing realities
Creative	Take responsibility for yourself. You can be anything you want to be.	Is there a different or better approach? What would you do about this situation if you had a magic wand?	Innovation new ideas new directions	Overlook proven processes Reinvent the wheel
Global	Look at the big picture. Let's think about the consequences of this decision.	What's best for the organization as a whole? How can you make a difference in the world?	Comprehensive view Inclusiveness Value of diversity	Idealism Loss of initiative or drive Inattention to detail
Systems	Solving one problem almost always creates others. "The whole is more than the sum of its parts"	Who are the key stakeholders? If we take this action, what consequences can we predict?	Divergent Holistic Finding key interrelationships	Equate models to reality Get lost in the clouds of complexity or theory
Learning	"Let one who is without sin cast the first stone." Here's another learning and growth opportunity.	What can you learn from this experience? How might you benefit from letting go of that grudge?	Ease of exploration Seeking growth and learning	May be taken advantage of Self-sacrificing Loss of discipline
Being	You'll never walk alone. Trust the process. As ye sow, so shall ye reap.	What really matters in your life? What does your "higher self" say about this?	Self-realization "Greater good" point of view	Become ungrounded Lose touch with "mainstream"

Table Three
Working With the Right Side Focuses