

Learning to Transform: Fostering Change through a Chaordic Perspective

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Introductory Keynote Presentation, The 3rd International Conference on Gross National Happiness World Views Make a Difference: Towards Global Transformation. Nongkhai and Bangkok, Thailand, 22 – 24 and 26 – 28 November 2007,

Stepping back and reflecting on history, I am amazed at where humanity is today in terms of population and technology; we have 6.6 billion people living on the planet, a high-speed global communications network, the convenience of air travel and still a continued drive to make a difference. There is an adjective which I think sums up the events and changes which have brought us to this point in time, *chaordic* (D.W. Hock, *The Birth of Choardic Organization: Human Resources or Resourceful Humans*, KPMG International Executive Series, 1999). For those who are new to the term, the meaning of *chaordic* evolves from two opposites, *chaos* and *order*. Hearing *chaos*, many of us may conjure up images of disorder such as the endless array of Bangkok traffic or, from a biologist's perspective, the cells of an embryo which, up close under a microscope, multiply at their own rate, in different directions and each with its own purpose. Yet, over time, these multiplying cells act collectively with a sense of order, according to a DNA blueprint, or a 'vision' if you will. The ongoing result, in some instances, is the emergence of a living, breathing human being.

One could also categorize the system of global human development as chaordic. Our world's governments, international agencies, NGOs, businesses, communities and individuals, on a micro level, tend to act on their own policies and for their own interests; and yet there continues to be development and progress, somehow, over time. But the direction in which we are heading, I would say, is not clear – or happy -- at all.

When we look around us today, what do we see? Excuse the sweeping generalisations, but I think it is clear that we see a widening rift between the rich and the poor – both among nations and between economic classes – and a growing

phenomenon of social exclusion. And what else? An over-emphasis on economic growth, and, as a result, alienation and de-humanisation in the push for material development. A deteriorating natural environment and the accelerating loss of both natural resources and bio-diversity. Rapid changes in economic structures and the labour market, usually to the disadvantage of the poor. A still-exploding HIV/AIDS epidemic. Increasing digital and knowledge divides between the haves and the have-nots of the world. The loss of cultural identity and diversity and the extinction of languages and the cultures that go with them. And an increase in intolerance, violence and terrorism. I could go through the latest figures on the numbers of people living in absolute poverty or without access to drinking water and basic health care, or the number dying per year due to environmental pollution and AIDS – or the growing gaps in income and internet use. But I won't...it's not a good way to start the day, and, after all... our discussions should be focused on pursuing Happiness.

Yes, this outlook on our global system is dismal in many respects, but, we begin to see evidence that we are moving in a different, more informed direction, and, more importantly, we are moving there together. The next time you have a chance, take a moment and do a Google search for the words 'youth' 'MDG' 'initiatives' and see how many hits you receive, over 550,000 and climbing the last time I checked, almost three times that of two years ago. One might argue that there are more web pages carrying these terms today, and undoubtedly there are, but this number also reflects the increasing number of youth becoming engaged in global issues, which could only be of benefit for humankind.

With the vast amount of technology today, coupled with good will, we have an opportunity to positively influence global consciousness and steer our global chaotic system in the right direction for the first time in history. But what is this direction, or this 'vision' for the future? Where and how do we see society progressing in 50 or 100 years? If the vision entails focusing progress around the notion of happiness, which I whole-heartedly support, how do we steer our global system to maximize well-being? How do we manoeuvre the system in light of traditional economic statistics still used to measure success? How do we change the behaviour of individuals who still strive to become wealthy, even knowingly, at the expense of others? These are some of the questions that UNESCO, and I'm sure many of us here, are attempting to understand in an effort to transform society

towards a sustainable future. From the perspective of one international organization, I'd like to share some of UNESCO's historical and more recent efforts to steer our global system in the direction of sustainable development and wellbeing for humanity.

UNESCO has played a unique role in promoting international cooperation and in contributing to the intellectual capacity of global citizenry. The origin of UNESCO dates back to 1922 at the creation of the International Commission on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC). This Commission brought together some of the most famous intellectuals in history including Albert Einstein, Marie Curie and Thomas Mann. The members of the Commission believed in their collective capacity to raise world consciousness, and to harmonise the world's intellectual and cultural treasures while striving to maintain respect for diversity and originality.

UNESCO followed on from the Commission after the formation of the United Nations in 1945. The world had been devastated by World War II, and UNESCO's mandate focused on fostering communication and international exchange for building a culture of peace. Sir Julian Huxley, the first Director-General of the organization, noted that for UNESCO to have a greater presence and influence than the previous Commission, it had to become more than an organisation of intellectuals and governments and develop a system for mass communication. Thus, the organization's basic mission today contributes to sustainable human development in a culture of peace, underpinned by tolerance, democracy and human rights.

The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education based here in Bangkok had a profound impact on the way UNESCO contributes to fostering communication and peace building. The individual most responsible for this impact was one of my predecessors, Raja Roy Singh, an intellectual and visionary, who sat for 20 years as director of the Bangkok office.

To build on a bit of regional history, when the Bangkok office was established in the early 1960s, UNESCO staff travelled around the region encouraging Member States to join the organization. At this time, countries in Asia were especially keen to keep the colonial world at a distance and were relieved to be free to make independent decisions within UNESCO. As an educator from India, Raja Roy Singh understood this desire to maintain national identity and independence, but also knew that the

UNESCO-centred approach in which knowledge flowed from the Headquarters to the region to the Member States would not suit Asia for very long. As Member States were recruiting their own intellectuals, especially in the area of curriculum development and teaching, they would soon have staff who were just as competent as their counterparts at UNESCO. Roy Singh took advantage of these strengths and thus linked Member States together in such a way that they could share experiences, discuss challenges and learn from each other's expertise. This type of networking, and international dialogue and collaboration that result from it, are very important in terms of setting UNESCO's agenda today.

UNESCO today dialogues and collaborates with 193 countries, one of which is Bhutan which became a Member State of the organization in 1982. The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, visited Bhutan in November of 2003 to meet with His Majesty the King, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister and Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley . During his visit, the Director-General exchanged views with the government on how to assist Bhutan in protecting traditional values and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation and assistance for achieving Education for All in Bhutan by 2015.

The Director-General's visit to Bhutan and collaboration with national leaders set the seed for further action by the Bhutanese government, UNESCO and other international organizations. One influence of the Director-General's visit was a project implemented by the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies (ILCS) in Thimpu, funded by the Japanese Funds-In-Trust, to compile an inventory of Bhutan's rich tradition of performing arts. In 2005, Bhutan's Mask Dance of the Drums from Drametse was rightly proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Returning to a vision for our global chaotic system, in the context of education, one extremely valuable resource developed through international collaboration is the Delors report. This report, entitled, **Learning: The Treasure Within**, was written by a team of educators from 14 countries representing 5 continents and published by UNESCO in 1996.

In support of education for the 21st Century, The Delors Report suggests four pillars for learning which, in my view, offer a potential foundation for establishing a

collective vision for the future: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.

These four pillars should be at the core of education and learning around the world. Others have suggested a fifth, a somewhat more proactive pillar – which I fully endorse and which I think essential given what has happened to the planet in the decade since the Delors Report was published: *learning to transform*, or learning to change the world.

But if we do “learn to transform”, what do we need to change? Here I will introduce what I think is a necessary ingredient to establish a vision for change and steer our global chaordic system toward wellbeing and happiness – that is, education for sustainable development for a sustainable future. We need to learn to live together in order to help our planet and humankind survive. This means ensuring, in the famous words of the so-called Brundtland Report of 1987, that development must “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (**Report of the World commission on Environment and Development**, 1987).

And in order to do this, we need to transform the world and ourselves – change the way we live and the values and behaviours reflected in our lives and, ultimately, in the education systems which, in the best of circumstances, can make a difference in the way we live.

The movement of Education for Sustainable Development has now been formalised through the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which was proposed by Japan and 42 other nations at the World Summit for Sustainable Development held in South Africa in 2002 and endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations later that year. I think it essential that Education for Sustainable Development be used to enhance, and in turn to be enhanced by, the pillars of the Delors Report.

What would this meshing of the Delors Report and the principles of Education for Sustainable Development look like? What would it mean for steering our global chaordic system? There are four essential components of Education for Sustainable Development, which are, perhaps coincidentally, aligned with the pillars of Gross

National Happiness – environmental, economic, social, and cultural. These components can be used to enhance the pillars of learning in the Delors report, and they reinforce development paradigms which emphasize wellbeing.

Thus, we must learn how to transform environmentally – to address pressing issues such as the exhaustion of our resources, prevent and mitigate the effects of natural disasters, and promote responsible, or “green,” consumption.

We must learn to transform economically – to gain a sensitivity to the limits and potential of economic growth and its impact on society and on the environment, to encourage “green growth” and to work together to reduce poverty and hunger, thus improving the health and safety of society.

We must learn to transform socially –to understand the nature of governments, civil society, organised religions and businesses and how these institutions interrelate; to provide access to resources for learning and making informed decisions; to work together to fulfil human rights, guarantee peace and human security; and to promote gender equality, good governance, and good health.

And we must learn to transform culturally –to promote inter-national, inter-faith, and inter-cultural understanding and to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity. This means, for example, ensuring that the many minority languages and cultures in Asia are not allowed to die and that the increasingly complex mix of cultures in Europe does not become, again, an explosive one. Preserving cultural heritage and diversity, especially among often increasingly marginalised indigenous peoples, must become as much a priority as preserving biodiversity. (Much more money, I would guess, is being spent on saving threatened species than on saving threatened languages and cultures.) -- in other words, allowing people the right to remain “others” and in terms of Happiness, allowing people to live comfortably in their own environment.

Simply speaking, we need to learn to transform our behaviours and values – environmentally, socially, economically, and culturally -- in order to promote sustainable development, happiness and wellbeing. Education for sustainable

development aims to do this by empowering all people, through learning, to assume responsibility for creating wellbeing for the future.

One point before I close. It may be easy for us here to view happiness and sustainable development – and the sufficiency economy of His Majesty the King of Thailand -- as mutually reinforcing paradigms for change; however, real transformation will only occur once we share a collective vision for development with all people. Only then can we confront practical issues at the national, community and individual level to foster the necessary change in our values and behaviours for wellbeing. This vision must come from a higher-level dialogue – what we in UNESCO call a dialogue among cultures, civilisations, and peoples. Fostering such a dialogue can only occur on the basis of both an attempt to find commonly shared values within the unity of humankind and the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilisation and each culture.

In our global chaordic system, all governments, all communities, all individuals, all businesses, and all institutions and organizations have their role to play in fostering a collective vision and steering the system in the direction of peace, wellbeing and sustainable development. UNESCO will continue its role in the global chaord through programmes in education, culture, science and communication; we will continue to promote dialogue among nations, organizations and peoples; and we will strive to foster a vision for transformation through education for sustainable development.

By learning to transform at all levels, we can establish a collective vision owned by all citizens - call it Happiness, call it sustainable development or see it as a mutually reinforcing combination of both - by collaborating, we begin learning to steer our global chaordic system to transform this vision into reality.