

A Role for Business Schools in Leadership, Futures and Ethics

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Abstract

What this essay sets out to argue is for inclusion of futures studies within business studies as a way of broadening the primarily economics discourse business schools are required to have. This can balance humanity's needs for societal transformation with the organisation's needs for organisational transformation through an inclusive integral leadership approach. Indeed, are the two different?

I believe that, to date, they have been; for the future it is desirable that they are not. Leadership has traditionally been defined as command and control on the one hand, and using the heroic language of conquest and victory on the other. Based on our research, I argue that leadership is actually about inner happiness and organisational effectiveness. Essentially this means finding a work-life balance. Without this balance, leaders and organisations become toxic, they are unable to reflect on who they are, and more importantly, in a futures context, where they are going.

Introduction

The essay first outlines the inclusion of futures in the programs at the author's business school, then sets out some of the arguments in favour of this practice, and what this might mean for the way business operates. Futures studies have become accepted and play a legitimate role in our programs. In these programs the foundation of futures thinking / futures studies is simple:

What kind of world do I want to live in? What kind of world do we want to live in? It involves an emphasis on individuals and organisations thinking about the future and what new values, virtues and goals are needed for a better world: What kind of world do you want to live and work in?

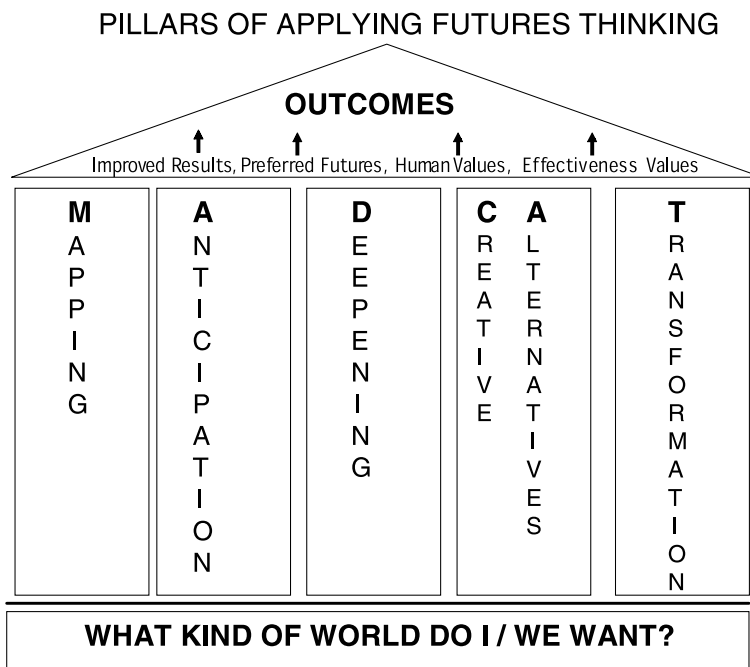
Considering these questions requires future consciousness. Tom Lombardo (www.odysseyofthefuture.net) describes future consciousness as:

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Future Consciousness is part of our awareness of time, our temporal consciousness of past, present, and future and includes the normal human abilities to anticipate and imagine the future, to have hopes and fears about the future, and to set goals and make plans for the future. It includes thinking about the future, evaluating different possibilities and choices, and having feelings,

motives, and attitudes about tomorrow including the total set of ideas, visions, theories, and beliefs humans have about the future-the mental content of future consciousness.

Future Consciousness is the total integrative set of psychological abilities, processes, and experiences humans use in understanding and dealing with the future.

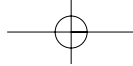


"APPLYING FUTURES THINKING" Program, Robert Burke & Sohail Inayatullah, Mt Eliza Centre for Executive Education, adapted from *Questioning The Future* Sohail Inayatullah, 2005 Tamkang University, Taiwan

Figure 1: Applying Futures Thinking

The methodology we employ in the programs is adapted from Sohail Inayatullah's model (2005), depicted in Figure 1, which forms the basis of a five day residential program "Applying Futures Thinking", facilitated by Inayatullah and the author. This is the methodology of: Mapping the past (through the methodology of shared history); Mapping the future (through the futures triangle, futures

wheel and futures landscape); Disturbing the future (through emerging issues analysis and macrohistory); Deepening the future (through causal layered analysis and Wilber's integral thinking); Creative alternatives (through scenario planning); and Transforming the future (through visioning and backcasting). The program applies theory as shown in Table 1 below¹.



..... A ROLE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN LEADERSHIP

Sensemaking	Research	Application
<p>Sensemaking is rooted in time and space, and occurs at the intersection of:</p> <p>Foresight: ability to use, imagine & create futures</p> <p>Hindsight: understanding “hows” & “whys” of today</p> <p>Insight: foresight & hindsight to decision making today</p>	<p>Metatheory</p> <p>presumptions:</p> <p>Ontology</p> <p>Epistemology</p> <p>Teleology</p> <p>Axiology</p> <p>Ideology</p>	<p>Mapping the Future</p> <p>Anticipation the Future</p> <p>Deepening the Future</p> <p>Creative Alternatives</p> <p>Transformation</p>

Table 1: Futures–theory to application

In addition to this program, futures studies is also taught in our "Advanced Management Program", the Mt Eliza Business Leadership Program, an EMBA module, the "Senior Executive Program", the "Strategic Leadership Program", and various programs for individual corporate clients. Indeed, the role of futures in the school has increased dramatically over the past two years.

Why include futures in a business school curriculum?

Unlike many other sciences, economics is linked both to ethics and to the theory of rationality (Hausman & McPherson 2000: 230). Although many economists regard economics as a "positive" science of one sort of social phenomenon, economics is built around a normative theory of rationality, and has a special relevance to policy making and the criticism of social institutions. Economics complements and intersects with moral philosophy in both the concepts it has constructed and in its treatment of normative problems.

Ethics is included in the programs through axiology, questions about values, and in the applied sense: business ethics through the philosophies of economics. Indeed, as George

(2004: 4) reports:

Every time there is a corporate scandal there are calls for business schools to spend more time teaching ethics. It seems to make sense: why not learn to be good while learning to be smart? But it's a mandate that's almost impossible to carry out ... A revealing survey conducted by the University of Michigan found that chief executives listed ethics as the second most important skill for young managers to have, behind business strategy. But when asked about the skills that had been most critical for their own careers, CEOs left ethics off the list completely.

This call on business schools to include ethics comes at a time when, I believe, more than just financial rewards are sought from those in organisations and from those involved in commercial businesses. It comes at a time when the global society as a whole is questioning leadership, our political leaders as well as our organisational leaders, and when it is evident that there is a shift of power away from governments towards corporations.

Some see this power shift as an opportunity. For example, the "Breakfast" program on the Australian national public broadcaster, ABC Radio, began a 2005 interview with Mary

Robinson² with:

We've all heard the statistics: every 24 hours more than 30,000 children around the world die of a preventable disease, while one billion people still don't have access to clean water. (11 August, 2005 <www.abc.net.au/rn>)

Its easy to be numbed into inaction by such tragic figures, but according to Mary Robinson the answer is to use the "new globalisation" sweeping the world to help solve these problems. Robinson is arguing that there has been a shift in power towards the corporations and perhaps through this corporate power using futures, leadership and ethics, a new way forward could be possible. I see this as a major challenge for business schools that have traditionally had a unique opportunity to influence the corporate agenda and could use their position to influence social investment. The need to include futures studies and ethics as a leadership imperative I believe is clear.

Rarely, it seems to me, have business schools in the past focussed on the inner individual and their world of meaning or the outer collective and the mythology of the organisation. I am not suggesting that this has been intentional; however, from an integral perspective this would suggest that business schools in the past have primarily been concerned only with the outer individual through devices such as "360 degree feedback" and personality instruments, and with the outer collective through strategies, processes and procedures.

In the early 1990s I heard a lecture at the University of NSW given by John Ralston Saul. It was in this lecture that Ralston Saul alerted me to the possible connection between business schools and organisational ethics. In his 1993 book *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West*, Ralston Saul stated that:

No matter which way they [business leaders] turn, they find other elites to confirm the reflection of themselves and of one another. Virtually identical programs in business schools and schools of public affairs are turning out people trained in the science of systems management. The Harvard Business School case method is

the most famous example of this general obsession with management by solutions, a system in which the logic will always provide support for the conclusions ... In a sense the training in all these schools is designed to develop not a talent for solving problems but a method for recognising the solutions which will satisfy the system. After that the established internal logic will provide all the necessary justifications. (1993: 21)

Ralston Saul also commented (1993: 121):

The problem with traditional notions of organisational leadership is the imbalance between needs in search of a healthy equilibrium. What is missing is imagination, creativity, moral balance, knowledge, common sense, and a social view. Instead, the traditional notion of leadership actively seeks people who foster imbalance and then exaggerates it. As a result amorality also grows and what is encouraged is the growth of an undisciplined form of self-interest, in which winning is all that counts.

David C. Korten's 1999 book *The post corporate world after capitalism* used statements such as:

Capitalism is a pathology that commonly afflicts market economies in the absence of vigilant public oversight. Since the economy internal to a corporation is a planned economy, the current consolidation of economic control under a handful of global corporations is a victory for central planning - not the market economy. The alternative to the new global capitalism is a global system of healthy market economies that function as extensions of local ecosystems to meet the needs of people and communities. (<http://www.davidkorten.org>)

This seemed to me to be the 'emerging issue' for Business Schools.

The "trend" phase is where, I believe, we are currently, as recent statements in leading business journal articles indicate:

Business schools do not need to do a great deal more to help prevent future Enrons; they need only to stop doing a lot they currently do ... By propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools

A ROLE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN LEADERSHIP

have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility. (Ghoshal 2005: 75)

And Warren G. Bennis and James O'Toole (2005) argue that there is too much focus on "scientific" research and not enough on other ways of knowing, other epistemologies.

Dominant contemporary business perceptions of futures

In contrast, a special report in *The Economist* (2005) on Corporate Social Responsibility, reprinted with permission by 'The Company Director' (March 2005: 38) concluded that, "The proper business of business is business. No apology required". Is this typical of the current business school view? Could we apply this reasoning to people in the workforce? Is the proper business of people in the workforce people? No apology required? If so do we have a dilemma that being was the economy designed to be of service to humanity. Or have we designed humanity to be of service to the economy?

The *Economist's* conclusion is echoed by Bill Emmott in his book, *20: 21 Vision*. Emmott suggests that, "Futurology should be seen just for what it is, namely enjoyable speculation. It cannot be more than that" (Emmott 2004: 4). *20: 21 Vision* is Emmott's attempt at being a futurist. He is unashamedly pro-globalisation and his book attempts to answer the questions about whether the United States and capitalism can remain dominant. He is optimistic that they can, and indeed, for him, they must. Emmott, who is the editor of *The Economist* newspaper, and therefore influential in economic circles, states that, "wars destroy economies, peace builds them". He suggests that looking at our past will give us directions for the future and ways to address this issue, with our future as a testing ground for our ethics and values. Emmott uses a futures methodology, that of Mapping the Future—that is, using patterns and trends revealed through history as the basis for making predictions about the future. However, he makes no reference to any of the serious

futures thinkers such as Sohail Inayatullah, Johan Galtung, Richard Slaughter, Wendell Bell, Ashis Nandy, Raine Eisler, Clement Bezold, Jim Dator, Graham Molitor, or the many others associated with the World Futures Society and the World Futures Studies Federation, who may have been able to give him a more balanced insight. Instead, Emmott chooses to rely mainly on economists and politicians.

Emmott questions many of the current scientific thoughts about population growth, sustainability and equalisations to show that he has considered these other variables; however, to him they appear to be interesting, but not convincing arguments. For example, in evaluating capitalism's environmental consequences, although the last century saw world population triple and the utilisation of newly discovered resources to support that growth, he does not understand the concern about "sustainable development". Emmott asks, "Don't fish farms counterbalance depletion of wild ocean stocks?", and maintains that they do; similarly, even though "few sheep and cows live in the wild any longer", he argues that we do not seem to have a "sheep crisis" or a "cow crisis". This is clever but it is also manipulative and typical of the all-too-common "end justifies the means" scenarios. He is effectively suggesting that any method we might use to end the natural life of a species is justified as a means because this death is a totally legitimate end. But we know that "mad cow disease", avian influenza, Newcastle disease, and many fish diseases are a result of "farming" as these diseases rarely occur in the natural state.

An alternative paradigm

At the November 2005 Tamkang University conference, Global Soul – Global Mind – Global Action, Ian Lowe gave an alternative view, stating that:

... history shows that some impressive societies collapsed, while others resolved serious threats to their survival. It is an important reminder that past trend is not necessarily future destiny. Problems can be resolved and alarming trends can be halt-

ed...societies choose to survive or fail, that our fate is not a matter of chance, but a result of social choices.

He asks us to consider what would create unsustainable futures, including:

- Exponential population growth
- Growing consumption per person
- Base economy on consumption
- Deplete mineral resources e.g. oil
- Over use fisheries, forests
- Disrupt the global climate
- Widen inequality
- Embrace crass materialism

Low's comment and list to me emphasise the current discourse at business schools (Emmott's) and what I am proposing needs to be added (Lowe et al.).

What is a way forward for business and business schools?

To begin with the teleology question: Why does this particular phenomenon called leadership become what it becomes? And: What is the purpose that causes this phenomenon called leadership to do what it does about ethics and what it does about our future?

The following model (Figure 2) inspired by the Tamkang conference, maps out a way for business schools to become more involved in ethics and preferred futures. It is impressive indeed that Tamkang University has futures studies as a compulsory subject, giving its students the opportunity to be thinking and behaving from these multiple perspectives. Tamkang's model has been inspirational for us and I would argue that our university's (University of Melbourne) "Growing Esteem" project has many of the values that Tamkang University posits.

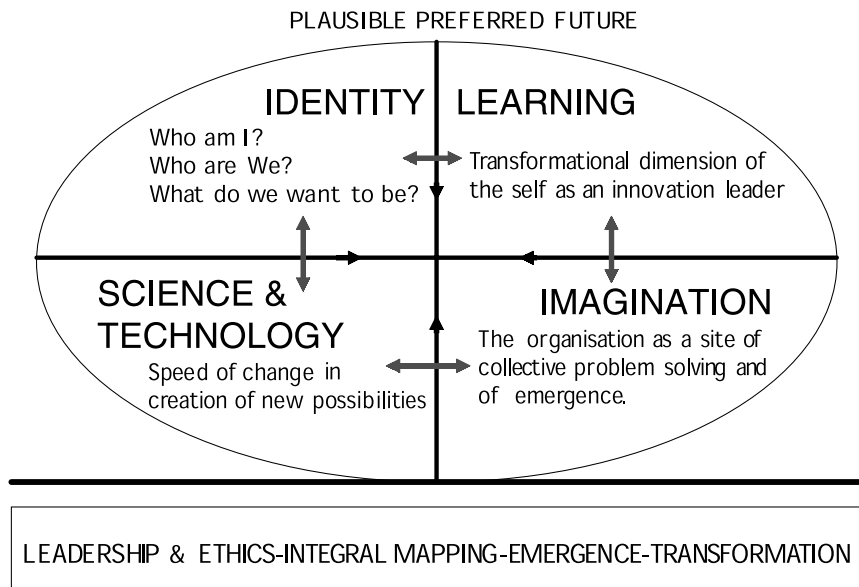


Figure 2: Leadership and Ethics

..... **A ROLE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN LEADERSHIP**

Inayatullah (2005: 141-142) sees that, in organisations, our understandings of the global could lead to change, with leaders and organisations themselves becoming more conscious-self-aware and reflective. We are moving from the command-control ego-driven organisation, to the learning organisation, and ultimately to the learning and healing organisation. Each step involves seeing the organisation less in mechanical terms and more in Gaian living terms. The key organisational asset becomes its human assets, its collective memory and its shared vision.

Particularly in the West, we have seen the trend to reduce everything to instrumental reality. In more recent years, however, there has been a "reawakening" of our consciousness about what it means to be human. This "egoic" stage in the evolution of consciousness has led to a profound shift in the way human beings think and behave.

The shift is echoed in business. Our organisation has, for the past four years, produced the Mt Eliza Leadership Index, authored by Dr Karen Morley, the School's Associate Dean for

executive programs. For the 2005 Index, the following were surveyed:

- 697 managers, 30% of whom were women
- 43% Generation X, 35% Existentialist, 16% Baby boomer, 2% Silent
- 6% supervisors, 25% middle managers, 30% senior managers, 13% executives, 11% senior executives, 8% CEOs

The main industries represented were: Services; Public Sector; Transport, Communication and Utilities; Manufacturing; Finance, Insurance and Real Estate. Of these, 14% had no direct reports, 55% had 1-10 direct reports, 14% had 11-20 direct reports, 11% had 21-100 direct reports, 5% had > 100 direct reports.

The surveys enable a comparison of the top leadership challenges seen over the past four years to be made (Figure 3). Achieving a reasonable work-life balance was either first or second over the last three years; before that, this was not considered a major issue, indicating rapid changes in inner happiness and organisational effectiveness over this short time frame.

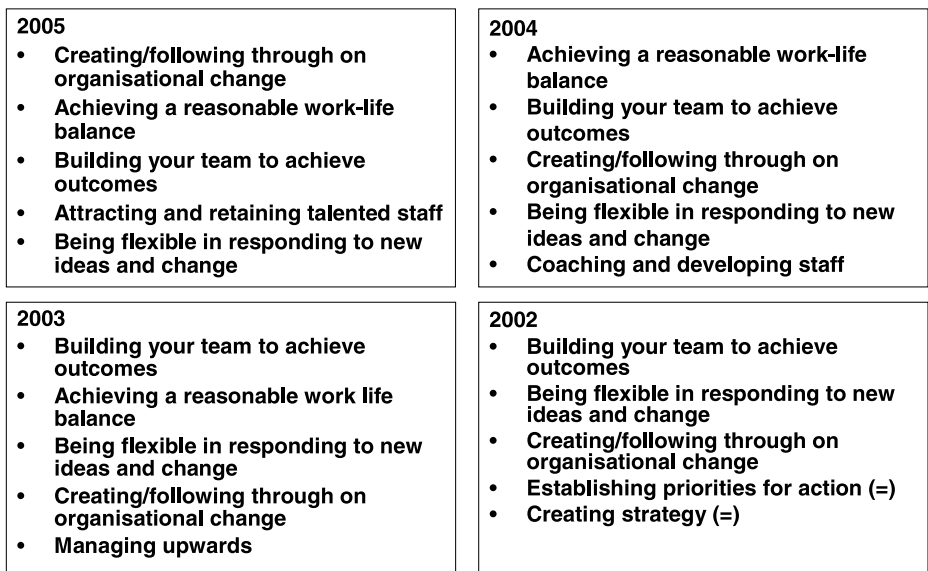


Figure 3: Top 5 current leadership challenges

JOURNAL OF FUTURES STUDIES

When Morley examined what participants thought would be the top five future leadership challenges, achieving a reasonable work-life balance

was again prominent, rated as either the first or second most significant challenge (Figure 4).

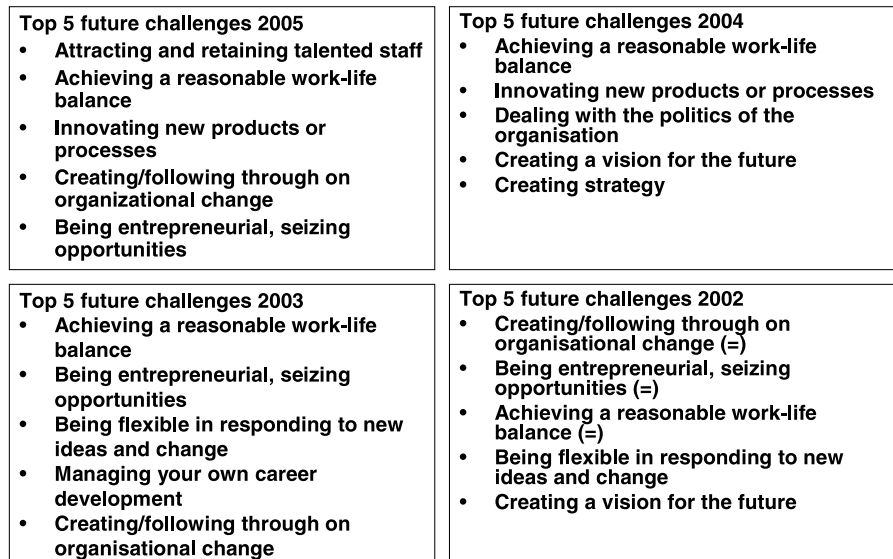


Figure 4: Top 5 future leadership challenges

At the same time, the Leadership Index (Figure 5) has shown a considerable downturn in how we perceive our business leaders, compared with previous years. I believe this is indicative of societal views of global leadership generally, and of how our understanding of the global is changing. It is no longer enough to have "heroic" leadership with its language of conquest and victory; much more is needed, as Morley states:

There have been far greater movements in managers' perceptions of their CEOs over time. Managers' ratings for CEOs were higher in all qualities in 2003 compared with the following two years. Ratings this year have diminished further from last year. This appears to indicate there is a crisis of confidence in the leadership effectiveness of our CEOs, and that their negative image is only worsening. (2005: 44)

A ROLE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN LEADERSHIP

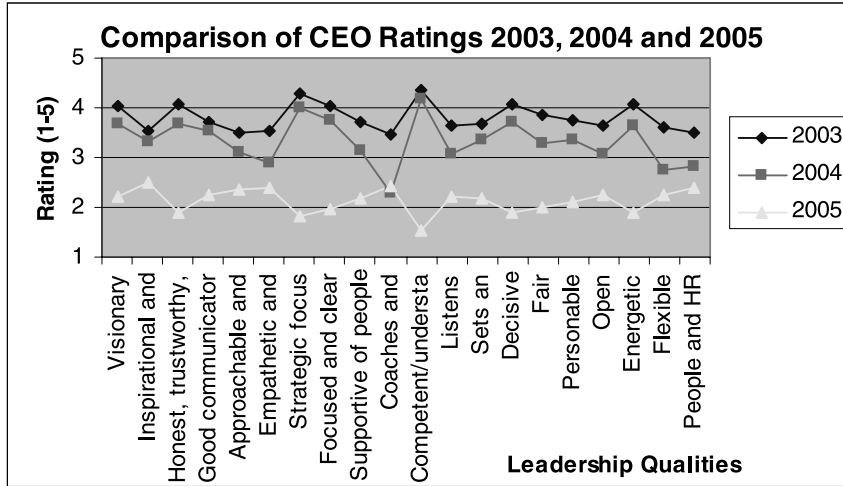


Figure 5: Leadership Effectiveness

So there is a role for futures!

The Greeks had a beautiful word, *Kosmos*, which means the patterned Whole of existence, including the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms. Ultimate reality was not merely the cosmos, or physical dimension, but the *Kosmos*, or physical and emotional and mental and spiritual dimensions altogether. Not just matter, lifeless and insentient, but the living Totality of matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit. The *Kosmos!*-now there is a real theory of everything! But us poor moderns have reduced the *Kosmos* to the cosmos, we have reduced matter and body and mind and soul and spirit to nothing but matter alone, and in this drab and dreary world of scientific materialism, we are lulled into the notion that a theory uniting the physical dimension is actually a theory of everything....

The new physics, it is said, actually shows us the mind of God. Well, perhaps, but only when God is thinking about dirt. So without in any way denying the importance of unified physics, let us also ask: can we have a theory, not merely of the cosmos, but of the *Kosmos*? Can there be a genuine Theory of Everything? Does it even make sense to ask

this question? And where would we begin? (Wilber 2001: xi-xii)

We also need to understand the search for individual and collective meaning within deep global action. There is a possible link with futures studies as it infers that leadership needs to be connected to ethics and futures in a complex world, and by using futures methods such as Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), there is a way of deconstructing and reconstructing a deeper global action for organisational leaders.

Through futures studies there exists the opportunity for the powerful new global corporate leaders to re-examine their value set to overcome the current global corporate norms, and this perhaps could be a new role facilitated by business schools. Value and value commitment arise in values of self-formation, which is an integral part of the self. Values are not absolutes contingent on a particular situation but take on the form of idealisations, imaginative constructions as a whole to which we subscribe to. They are higher purposes we are creating. Values give us a feeling of fulfilment, which makes us feel like living and is the motivation for doing the work we do. Values open up options for deep global action whereas norms dose them down.

What are contrasting approaches to

human thrival? How can we move from survival to thrival?

This could be one argument for organisational group psychotherapy (the healing organisation) and in taking this a step further. Just as the Leadership Index reflects changing priorities among business leaders, there is mounting evidence to suggest that although people in the West are arguably wealthier than their parents, they are less happy:

The belief that more money makes us happier has all the characteristics of an addiction, one on which the survival of consumer capitalism depends. But a politics that has the courage to penetrate beneath the surface of material desire, and to promise rich lives instead of riches, has an intuitive appeal for all but the most hard-bitten victims of consumer consciousness. (Hamilton 2003: 209).

We can see a trend emerging that the quest for life is a quest for happiness through which we might reach some purpose and meaning for our existence. Richard Eckersley (2004) wrote:

In the past, the quest for material progress and prosperity provided much of that "guiding story" for Western nations, perhaps especially the newer nations such as Australia and the US. It seems it no longer does. Progress needs to be redefined, the story rewritten, taking account of a new global context - social, economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual. (p.5)

It could be possible for applied futures thinking to make a difference if we use the tools and epistemology for leadership transformation by entering a different conversation about what it means to be a human, not as a resource, but as a living person, in an organisation and in our modern society as a whole.

How do inner and outer dimensions of humanity's evolution interact?

More research is needed on achieving a "work-life balance". Ricardo Semler begins his

book *The Seven-Day Weekend: A Better Way to Work in the 21st Century* (2003) with three questions:

- Why are we able to answer emails on Sundays, but unable to go to the movies on Monday afternoon?
- Why can't we take kids to work if we can take work home?
- Why do we think the opposite of work is leisure, when in fact it is idleness?

Semler's book underlines that the priority in the workplace are undergoing a fundamental shift from control and command to synthesis and cooperation. This, in my opinion, is an example of inner and outer dimensions and is a result of personal vision and values being able to have a legitimate presence within an organisation. For example, without our own vision (the purpose we give to our lives), we become part of someone else's vision for us. Without a sense of values (the meaning we give to our lives), we are victims of someone else's. Without vitality we have no energy to prevent us living someone else's idea of what our lives should be.

The employee/employer expectations of life, happiness and healing can be helped by these insights as it emphasises that we are not powerless and that we can take control of our own lives. From a healing point of view, as Inayatullah (2005: 141) suggests, we can address individual health—are you feeling fulfilled, what are you doing to create a healthier life; as well as group health—are you getting along with others, do you support others in the office, do they emotionally support you; and, as Semler has done, organisational health—what are some measures of this, just profit, or are there others, such as triple bottom line. And, most importantly your Kosmic health - your spiritual life.

Another research premise is that the most important things we do cannot be measured. These are open ended conversations around identity of: Who are we, or What are we doing together? This is the inner and outer strategy we are involved in. It is an emergent strategy: we are endlessly searching for enough agreement to take the next steps. And the next steps

A ROLE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN LEADERSHIP

are iterative temporal processes, basic patterns of interactions moving recursively through time, what we are doing together. After all, strategy is what we actually do.

One role for a futurist is questioning the future and challenging assumptions at all levels within the organisation. At an organisational level, critical questions are: What has been the role of the organisations in achieving a reasonable work-life balance? And, how will revolutions in science and technology impact human and gaian evolution?

New stories for business

Change happens from within the interaction between people and the stories that evolve as a result and from the themes these stories create. These themes are mainly narrative in nature as we develop our stories. Our lives are the living of these stories mostly through narrative forms, and at the same time that we are being formed, these narratives are forming our experience for the future as propositional themes (Stacey 2001). In management courses we are taught that communication (part of forming the narrative) is a process, a cognitive process with a social context. In my view this is only partly correct. This view supports the intellect as the main basis of communication and does not take into consideration the other ways of knowing and communicating such as intuition, instincts and relationships. We are also taught that communication is about the way we construct meanings from encounters with others. This suggests reason, philosophy and rationality, but also that communication is a sense experience informed by evidence gained from the encounter with others. The meaning also includes intuition (which could involve spirituality), which gives us a direct perception of knowledge.

Communication is concerned with the reduction of uncertainty and therefore is necessary and inevitable. Communication effectiveness, however, is largely related to how well we can co-ordinate our meanings with those who interact with us, hence the high degree of ambiguity that exists in our communications with

others.

The transformational challenge for business schools now hinges, I suggest, on (re)introducing the teaching of philosophy, instigating conversations on the philosophy of economics centred on consciousness, spirit, transpersonal psychology. Such conversations could begin with questions about values, such as: What are our values that drive us towards a more meaningful life?, and, What are the beliefs and world views that help us explore our relationship with a more meaningful life? And for conversations about economic philosophy, prompts might include: Thinking about organisational leadership, what philosophy of economics would help achieve a more meaningful life for members of your organisation and your society in general?

Futures studies allow us the opportunity to ask these questions. It also allows participants on our programs at Mt Eliza to reassess the meanings they give to their organisations, and the opportunities new insights may reveal.

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Notes

1. Based on the work of Dervin, B., L. Foreman-Wernet & E.Layterbach, 2002. *Sense-Making Methodology Reader*: New Jersey: Hampton Press Inc. from Aaltonen, M.,(2005). "How Do We Make Sense of the Future." *Journal of Futures Studies*. May 2005, 9(4): 47.
2. Mary Robinson was President of Ireland for seven years and Human Rights Commissioner for five; she now heads up the Ethical Globalisation Initiative.

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JOURNAL OF FUTURES STUDIES

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