Response from Jon Smith,
On sustainable individual practices

There were three particular issues raised by Professor Guthrie on the education of engineers which resonated with my own experience of educating students for business:

- The need to prepare engineers to take account of the importance of the issue of sustainablity
- The obligation to educate and inspire engineering students
- Embedding sustainability as a requirement of the skill set of practising engineers; not having it as a specialist field in its own right.

However, as Professor Guthrie points out at the start of his paper, there is widespread use, and misuse, of the term. I like the practical definition given by Encombe (in Faragher, 2008:22), who says sustainability is:

> 'thinking for the long-term – on an organisational, society and personal level. If society is not sustainable then your organisation isn't either.'

In this definition Encombe identifies the importance of the personal level, which I think can often be overlooked in the sustainable debate. I would like to extend Encombe's point above. If we do not include the personal level, and do not develop students who look after their own health, well-being, development, and practices – self-sustaining practice if you like – then ultimately there will be nobody fit enough to consider the long term sustainability of organisations and society. The ever-growing numbers of depressed or stressed people in the workplace suggest that we are really missing a trick here. So perhaps this might read

> 'If individuals' own practices are not sustainable in the long term, then your organisation and society isn't either.'

I believe we have an obligation first to educate and inspire students in self-sustaining practices, if not then we will simply contribute to the growing 'sickness' in the workforce. In my teaching I have found the approach to learning which has had the greatest and most beneficial impact has been where I have used the student's experience to facilitate their own learning – so that they develop their own approach. Only once I've done this do I turn to the wider issues of the group, organisational and societal issues. In this way, students are personally engaged in issues of sustainability over a long-term, which ultimately leads to the exploration of the wider organisational and societal aspects. This approach automatically embeds sustainability as an inherent part of the curriculum, which hopefully means that students will ultimately work towards the creation of a healthy society over a period of time.

This way of embedding sustainability into the curriculum forms part of a holistic approach, where sustainability is not just explored on its own, but as an important element in a bigger set of factors which have to be considered by the teacher or leader. I have been developing with a colleague a framework called the Global Fitness Framework which includes these different elements. We use the term 'fitness' to describe the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of individuals, groups and society. So in relation to sustainability, ensuring physical, mental and spiritual self-sustaining practices gives fit individuals who have the long-term resources and capabilities to develop fit organisations and society.

Jon Smith, UK, 2008 Senior Lecturer, AIBS, Anglia Ruskin University

References

Faragher, J. (2008) Sustain to gain. *Personnel Today*. 22nd April

Endpiece: agenda for change

BRONWEN REES

This special issue on sustainability has thrown up a number of diverse but related themes. It is no surprise that the most pressing and important one to emerge is that of the nature of interconnectedness, and the imperative to collaborate on facing the challenges that are arising as the feedback mechanisms in our environment, material financial, political, force us to look more deeply into the current conditions. As a consequence of this recognition, there also seems to be an emerging consensus as to what is needed to face these challenges

Systemic reform

Steve Colling has identified a 'triangle' of change – governments, businesses, and citizens but shows how it is national self-interest that keep governments from undertaking the necessary changes for collective change – and of course in this interconnected world, most of us are voters as well – so we cannot simply blame the governments we elect. More fundamentally, Jack Reardon also pointed to the corporatism of liberal democracies which are largely motivated by individual self-interest, where profit takes precedence over ecological services, climate change and conservation. Some radical revision of this form is required. This is supported by Joel Magnuson who carefully analyses the systemic interaction between liberal democracies and our economic systems arguing that we need a more mindful practices to begin to make these radical changes.

Changing mindset

Whilst there has been a shift in our recognition of the problems that face us, it seems that the necessary shift in our ways of thinking about these problems has only just started. All of our contributors have called, in one way or another, for a new mindset that gets us beyond the paradigm of Newtonian thinking, and of endless growth as a ground for our action. Elizabeth Garnsey showed, we can no longer, rely on the laws of simple cause and effect as a way of collectively organising ourselves and our societies. If this underpins our thinking, as it has done for centuries, we fail to take into account our multiple and complex relationships with the earth that supports and nourishes us. By its nature, mindsets are difficult to change. So a major question we need to ask is: how do we overcome our own conditioning to find ways of collaborating that will provide enough for ourselves, for our children, and our children's children?

Slow down growth

Practically all our articles pointed to the ill effects of our relentless pursuit of growth. A radically different and well-established model came from Professor Puntasen. He showed how the Royal Thai Sufficiency Model which advocates building societies on the principles of moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity can lead to personal and organisational well-being, and even happiness. He provided evidence showing that the firms that emerged from the South East Asian crisis of 1997 were those who had followed principles of moderation and self-immunity. This is not just an Eastern phenomenon. A recent report in the

Sunday Times showed the worrying status of companies in the UK. In Southeast England 2300 companies were tagged as 'critical' compared to 387 over the same period in 2007. These companies are those who have borrowed to grow. Surely the current credit crunch and its effects on businesses and home owners alike is waking us up to some simple laws of nature – that if we grow and grow, we inevitably throw our system out of balance leading to sickness and collapse. If, on the other hand, we grow to our own limits, taking what we need, then the system can stay in equilibrium. Changing our mindsets may well mean not only looking to the future, but also seeking out the simple, but inviolable wisdoms of the past.

Taking action and commitment

Heartening messages in our issue come both from Elizabeth Garnsey and David Arkell, showing that there are solutions. We do not need to be thrown into doom and gloom – but we do need to inculcate a new spirit – a spirit of collective action that transcends academic divides and bureaucratic niceties. But in both cases this requires the mobilisation of energy that breaks out of old patterns and systems. For Elizabeth, we can look to simple solutions of how we work within time and space, dimensions that are freely available to us, and paradoxically not taken into account, because there is no obvious 'owner' and therefore no potential profit. Whilst in theory a simple solution – this too needs a leap of mind.

David Arkell shows us how passionate collaboration can lead to sustainable community transcending the problems of red tape – ways of working inside our institutions and still effecting real and lasting change – at every level – government, intra-government, local, global, educational, business and science. This is not a case of 'revolution' but of real 'co-evolution' bringing together hearts and minds not in the search for profit, but of creating homes and education for our future.

Implications for business and business education

So what are the implications, if any for businesses and business educators in this? The next issue of *Interconnections* will be addressing these issues in more depth, as we turn to global aspects of management practice. For example, can businesses afford to act solely for the creation of profit? Can our business curricula maintain its emphasis on competition, strategy and profit, in the light of what is happening? Just as Peter Guthrie suggested in his article about the education of engineers, sustainability should not be an 'add-on' but integral to the very core curriculum. If businesses continue in their 'bullish' fashion, will they attract the recruits they need to foster creativity? Will consumers continue to buy their goods? The cracks in the current systems are rapidly opening up, and no single finger in the dyke can begin to stem the flow. The challenge is enormous, but also potentially very exciting. Key to all of this will be methods of understanding and communication, ways of harnassing our collective energies to meet the feedback that the environment is already giving us – from this we could begin to ride the rapids of change which is inevitable, and be exhilarated by it, not drowned in it. This does require action, new ways of thinking, honesty, humility. What is clear is that we are entering a new world, and we would do better to be a conscious part of its unfolding, rather than passive victims' clinging to outmoded ways of transacting with one another. We want *Interconnections* to act as a bridge in this endeavour. For any comments, offers of contributions on the forthcoming issue on international management practice, please contact the editor.
E dr.bronwenrees@ntlworld.com