

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”

Abraham Lincoln.

Kelly Darcy, 1st January 2020.

Psychology, emotions and attitudes

The power in the words of Abraham Lincoln’s statement of “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today” is beyond measure, such powerful words provoke, knee jerk reactions, inspire movements, build on developments, create dissonance and sometimes a feeling of helplessness. For individuals, there is a complex set of hierarchical needs that leads us to the way we live (Maslow, 1987) in addition to our personality which also plays a large part in the way we make decisions based on those needs, for example, someone with more openness traits might have more altruistic and be more inclined to a sustainable option.

It is possible that gender also plays a large part in decisions when concerning morality, a study on moral cognition and gender revealed interesting results. “The relations of sex and gender-role identity to moral thought and prosocial personality traits were examined. Two hundred and nine men and women rated the importance of real-life, care-related, justice-related, and mixed (both care- and justice-related) moral dilemmas. Responses on the real-life and mixed dilemmas also were scored for care and justice orientations. Women and feminine persons viewed moral conflicts as more important than did men and masculine people. On the mixed dilemmas, women scored higher than men on care reasoning, whereas men scored higher than women on justice reasoning. Regardless of sex or gender role, relational real-life dilemmas evoked higher importance and care reasoning scores than did nonrelational ones. Women and persons high in femininity showed more empathic concern for other people. Masculine persons scored lower on personal distress, whereas androgynous persons reported more helpful behaviours than did all others” (Skoie, 2002).

Emotions are an important aspect of stimulating a more sustainable approach to leading an organisation, after looking into the five stages of grief model, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling (Kübler-Ross et al, 2009) within this context there are some direct correlations within the context of fashion as a business industry. An example of this is denial, a company may hire consultants to aid them with the status quo rather than face the prospect of acceptance and change.

The fashion industry market is highly competitive and the constant need to ‘refresh’ product ranges means that there is an inevitable move by many retailers to extend the number of ‘seasons’, that is, the frequency with which the entire merchandise within a store is changed.

With the emergence of small collections of merchandise, fashion retailers are encouraging consumers to visit their stores more frequently with the idea of 'Here Today, Gone Tomorrow'. (Bhardwaj et al, 2010) This worked to corporations advantage but at a cost to the planet. Although almost 100 per cent of textiles are recyclable, Americans threw away 13.1 million tons of textiles in 2010, of which more than 11 million tons were dumped in landfills (EPA, 2012).

A Wicked problem and major events in the 70's & 80's

Wicked problems as defined by Horst Rittel is defined as a problem that is difficult to solve due to the complex nature of the issue (Rittel, 1974), sustainability and business is a wicked problem that fits this definition. Design thinking and problem solving based theories are still a major part of addressing wicked problems and businesses should have a responsibility to address the issues surrounding the touchpoints relevant to them.

Julie Ann identified a resource highlighting multiple environmental disasters throughout the 70s and 80s that shocked people to their core, it was unavoidable not to be confronted with photos and evidence showing the extreme devastation and mass suffering brought about by man under the name of "progress". Perhaps the reason why so many people are desensitised to the news of such crises.

A few examples:

1970: Pacific Glory, English Channel: spill of 100,000 gallons of crude oil

1975: Banqiao Reservoir: Catastrophic collapse of 62 hydro dams in China

1978: Amoco Cadiz, off the coast of France: spill of 68 million gallons / 1.3 million barrels oil

1979: Three Mile Island Power Plant, USA: large amounts of reactor coolant and radioactive gases were released into the environment.

1984: Union Carbide Pesticide Plant in Bhopal, India: A toxic methyl isocyanate gas leak

1985: Ozone: British scientist Joe Farman publishes discovery of ozone hole over Antarctica

1986: Chernobyl, Ukraine: nuclear reactor explodes and goes into a full-scale melt-down

The desensitisation of the shocking news might have been more palatable as there were positive movements too. World leaders, individuals and organisations aided in furthering awareness through the implementation of multiple agreements and acts.

A Few Examples:

1970: First celebration of Earth Day

1970: Clean Air Act signed into law

1970: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty went into effect after it was ratified in the United Nations

1971: United Nations Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is signed in Ramsar, Iran

1971: Greenpeace starts up in Canada

1972: UN Conference on Human Environment/UNEP held in Stockholm

1973: Eighty nations sign the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

1980: World Conservation Strategy released by IUCN

1980: Global 2000 Report is released

1981: World Health Assembly unanimously adopts a Global Strategy for Health for All by the year 2000
1985: Live Aid Concert in aid of the Ethiopian Famine

The 70's oil crisis created a significant rise in ecological awareness and brought about a global realisation that the world's oil reserves, and resources in general, were, in fact, limited, and that technological development came at the price of harming the environment, compared to the "limitless progress" belief which had existed until then. The 70s was known for being a decade of economic problems, where inflation and unemployment steadily increased over time. This, in turn, generated a lack of faith and attitude of cynicism from the people towards their governments, and this distrust was not lessened by the scandals which rocked the political world during this time. (Watergate and Abscam are 2 such examples) In the 80s, developing countries suffered large scale economic and social difficulties, as they faced multiple debt crises, requiring many of them to apply for financial support from the IMF, whereas the developed world saw large economic growth and advances in technological development, with large multinational manufacturing corporations even relocating to other continents. The inconsistency in the quality of life versus location across the globe was evident, and again people in the developed world were confronted by images of suffering and devastation in the third world, such as the famine in Ethiopia. Seemingly unrelated human advances also impacted the public willingness to preserve nature. For example, during the Apollo 11 mission, (1969), concrete images of "the earth as an integrated, life-supporting system" were transmitted back to earth, and shaped a further understanding of the need (Julie-Ann, 2019).

Sustainability today

Businesses today face increasing demands from consumers to provide services, yet also fulfil ethical and social responsibility whilst being held to the old way of being profit-led. With no upper ceiling, and with such challenges, businesses adopt a CSR programme or weave some kind of sustainability fingerprint through their business from the start or later as a way of tokenism, which is problematic. Recently I personally reflected upon this in relation to Blockchain as a way of combating Greenwashing "I have researched blockchain applied to the fashion industry for my MSc, I feel like it has positive outcomes but overall it is still greenwashing in my eyes. The brands seem to pick and choose the parts of the supply chain they want consumers to see and play on them in a marketing campaign. If true and full transparency was available it would be somewhat detrimental to sales. The technology business I have been developing as a mark of true transparency aims to eradicate the 'green label' hides all flaws methods that currently exist from brands such as H&M with their conscious collection" (Darcy, 2019).

Greenwashing a term first coined by Jay Westervelt in 1986 is in need of an update, Greenwashing 2.0 as coined by Eric Lane "we need a new paradigm that takes a broader view of the phenomenon of greenwashing. Specifically, we should look beyond the traditional paradigm of greenwashing, which is limited to deceptive marketing of consumer products to individual consumers, and contemplate a wider variety of cases that include

representations made to green commercial consumers and legal actions brought by and on behalf of commercial consumers. By changing the greenwashing paradigm in this way and defining it more expansively to reflect the commercial realities of the cleantech revolution, we will eliminate the blind spot and provide the broader vantage point necessary to identify and understand new instances of greenwashing” (Lane, 2013). This prospect of accountability and reliability can help with part of the sustainability challenge.

Why we need to adopt sustainable practices is because of the ever-growing population, a powerful quote taken from an essay on the Principle of Population “The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man” (Thomas Malthus 1798) so poignantly phrases this, we as a species take more than we give. Not everyone believes in overpopulation, some think this is a myth, such as the columnist and agricultural economist at USDA Lyman Stone who states that the US can support food consumption for another 25% of the population “In short, we could feed more than 400 million people, total, merely by consuming locally what we now export” (Stone, 2019) however without taking into account the agriculture effects to climate change leading to droughts in other parts of the world I am afraid his theory does not have all the answers.

Many world leaders, philosophers, psychologists, businesses and citizens are tackling and voicing surrounding the discourse of responsibility in relation to wicked/sustainable issues, the United Nations SDGs are somewhat of the North Star in relation to the efforts to achieve equality for all living inhabitants of the earth.

A report by Ruckerfeller “On the population, travel requirements, consumption in food, clothing and general stuff. The burdens humans place on the environment and the resources of knowledge and money at our disposal to modify and adjust these burdens will contest endlessly. But we can surely gain green ground over the next 25 years”. At the time of this paper being published in 1995, it is 25 years since and we haven't gained green, well not at the rate required anyway (Ausubel, 1995).

Socio-cultural change and business developments

When looking at the historical roots of sustainable development Du Pisani’s comments that sustainable and development are contradictory and (Du Pisani, 2006), for me this is not something I believe is true, it depends on what you understand or value as development at an individual and societal level. Sustainable Development to me personally is not contradictory. I view development as a different measure of the status quo of economic growth. I think Australia recently they have been looking at measures of development away from that of GDP or taking into consideration other measures such as wellbeing and sustained environmental resources. Focusing exclusively on GDP and economic gain to measure development ignores the negative effects of economic growth on society, such as climate change and income inequality. It's time to acknowledge the limitations of GDP and expand our measure development so that it takes into account a society's quality of life. A number of countries are starting to do this. India, for instance, where we both work advising

the government, is developing an Ease of Living Index, which measures the quality of life, economic ability and sustainability (Kappor, 2019)

“Everyone is going to need to understand [climate change] the same way you’d assume everyone in business needs to have some fluency in social media today, or that everyone would be able to use a computer 20 years ago,” says Andrew Winston, author of the book *The Big Pivot: Radically Practical Strategies for a Hotter, Scarcer, and More Open World*.

Ethics, entrepreneurship and policy in sustainable business

The governments of producing countries worldwide are primarily responsible for working conditions and labour law compliance in factories. But according to international standards, though non-binding, global apparel and footwear companies or “brands” that order products manufactured in factories also have a responsibility to ensure that the rights of workers are respected throughout their supply chain. They must take measures to prevent and address human rights abuses (Stauffer, 2018)

Many influential voices have spoken out regarding the ethics and policy of accountability within sustainability in business “Soon there won’t be much to hide. People who are either inside or servicing the investment community will vacuum up everything that’s out there. They are using everything from GPS to Google Earth to collect information. It’s better for companies to provide this information themselves than have a data provider possibly misconstrue it and sell it as proprietary information to an investment or asset management company, and have it adversely impact the ratings. Companies will realize it’s better to be transparent” Prof. John Ruggie a former UN special representative for business and human rights

On The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) it involves systematising, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour as reported in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy a peer-reviewed academic resource. “Philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Metaethics investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean. Are they merely social inventions? Do they involve more than expressions of our individual emotions? Metaethical answers to these questions focus on the issues of universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves. Normative ethics takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or the consequences of our behaviour on others. Finally, applied ethics involves examining specific controversial issues, such as abortion, infanticide, animal rights, environmental concerns, homosexuality, capital punishment, or nuclear war” (Fieser, n.d).

My understanding of normative ethics are Teleological focuses on the End Game, the consequential aspects of a decision, a report by Stanford Social Innovation states in systemic change nonprofit leaders who ask “How do you scale up?” are most likely posing

the wrong question. Most nonprofits or those focusing on a social aspect, after all, face barriers to organizational growth that remain too high. But by asking a different question, and by focusing on a different kind of goal, leaders can maximize their ability to achieve significant social impact. For individuals and businesses, it can be impossible to decipher the butterfly effect of the consequences of even a single action. (Gugelev and Stern, 2015).

Deontological focuses on the actual decision, not the particular outcome, this within the context of consuming can cause issues, ethical offsetting "Ethical offsetting is the practice of undoing harms caused by one's activities through donations or other acts of altruism. Examples of ethical offsetting include purchasing carbon offsets to make up for one's carbon emissions and donating to animal charities to offset animal product consumption." (Zabel, 2016).

Businesses must be held accountable, there is a wave Purpose-washing: Where a company does state an intended purpose that acknowledges its role in wider society, this may not always be accompanied by an intention to deliver on that purpose. If we only talk about purpose as what we intend for our organisation to achieve, without bringing our core operations into alignment with this, then we change nothing.

Policy has a very important role to play in the opportunity for a sustainable future, upon watching the Ted Talk by Micheal Green on 'how can we make the world a better place by 2030' he describes a social progress report and a people report guide, the former is a matrix of the touchpoints that equate to achieving the UN sustainable development goals without necessarily always increasing GDP year on year (Green, 2015). Whilst he is optimistic that the world's leaders have signed and agreed to make and set policies to meet these goals there is a severe lack of action upon any of these policies being pushed through the governments worldwide to meet the deadline of 2030, one such report published by the Environmental Audit Committee within the UK Parliament titled Fixing Fashion recommended supply chain transparency and tax on new items or tax relief on sustainable enterprises (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019), not one of the recommendations in the February 2019 report has been actioned a year on.

What we can do as individuals is to be unreasonable as Willemijn Verloop suggested in her Ted Talk on Changing the world through social entrepreneurship, she states being unreasonable means to progress. A statement which I find interesting and when the trends of today seem to be that of needing quick solutions and easy answers which is why companies like Amazon and Google do so well, there is not much in the way of the "old fashioned was en mass'. The future of both businesses and individuals rely on such a shift to the 'unreasonable' because we are approaching irreversible damage (Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet, 2019). The next decade hopefully will present more consumer led demands for better practice, businesses being both ethical and purposeful and governments looking beyond GDP.

References

Ausubel, J. (1995). Consequences of climate change. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, [online] 103(12), pp.1085-1086. Available at: <https://phe.rockefeller.edu/publication/environment-since-1970/>.

Bhardwaj, V. and Fairhurst, A., 2010. Fast fashion: response to changes in the fashion industry. *The international review of retail, distribution and consumer research*, 20(1), pp.165-173.

Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet. (2019). Scientific Consensus: Earth's Climate is Warming. [online] Available at: <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].

Darcy, K, 2019. Moodle entry USWTSD. The Challenge of Sustainability.

Du Pisani, J. (2006). Sustainable development – historical roots of the concept. *Environmental Sciences*, 3(2), pp.83-96.

Environmental Audit Committee (2019). *Fixing Fashion*. London: UK Parliament.

EPA (2012), "Textiles", available at: www.epa.gov/osw/conservation/materials/textiles.htm (accessed 7 February 2013).

Fieser, J. (n.d.). Ethics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [online] iep.utm.edu. Available at: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].

Green, M. (2015). How We Can Make the World a Better Place by 2030. [video] Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_green_how_we_can_make_the_world_a_better_place_by_2030?language=en [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].

Gugelev, A. and Stern, A. (2015). What's Your Endgame? (SSIR). [online] [Ssir.org](http://ssir.org). Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/whats_your_endgame [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].

Julie-Ann. (2019) Moodle entry USWTSD accessed 23 Dec. 2019

Kapoor, A. (2019). GDP Is Not a Measure of Human Well-Being. [online] *Harvard Business Review*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2019/10/gdp-is-not-a-measure-of-human-well-being> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2019].

Kübler-Ross, E. and Kessler, D., 2009. The five stages of grief. In *Library of Congress Catalogin in Publication Data* (Ed.), *On grief and grieving* (pp. 7-30).

Lane, E.L., 2013. Greenwashing 2.0. *Colum. J. Env'tl. L.*, 38, p.279.

Maslow, A. and Lewis, K.J., 1987. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Salenger Incorporated, 14, p.987.

Rittel, H.W. and Webber, M.M., 1974. Wicked problems. Man-made Futures, 26(1), pp.272-280.

Skoe, E.E., Cumberland, A., Eisenberg, N., Hansen, K. and Perry, J., 2002. The influences of sex and gender-role identity on moral cognition and prosocial personality traits. Sex Roles, 46(9-10), pp.295-309.

Stauffer, B. (2018). World Report 2018: Rights Trends in "Soon There Won't Be Much to Hide". [online] Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/essay/transparency-in-apparel-industry> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].

Stone, L. (2019). Why you shouldn't obsess about "overpopulation". [online] Vox. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/12/12/16766872/overpopulation-exaggerated-concern-climate-change-world-population> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2019].

Zabel, C. (2016). Ethical offsetting is antithetical to effective altruism. [Blog] Effective Altruism Forum. Available at: <https://forum.effectivealtruism.org/posts/Yix7BzSQLJ9TYaodG/ethical-offsetting-is-antithetical-to-ea> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].