

Creativity is a fundamental component of the contemporary leadership repertoire yet how many of us truly believe we have the capacity to create? How often do we gaze with longing, and not a little envy, at the artistic achievements of others, generally dismissing the fact that...

Creativity is our natural state

By Michael Schimmelschmidt

“The Universe is creative”. This statement, a paradigm in its own right, opens the old debate between traditional and “new” sciences about the ultimate predictability of the universe – the universe as a machine or clockwork that at some time can be understood and controlled or, on the other side, the universe as a complex network of self-organising systems which is ever changing and evolving – which is “alive”.

The notion of a universe as a cold, dead mechanism has governed much of the rational and intellectual development of the human race since the age of enlightenment. In this worldview it is understood that the world can be perceived objectively, that our language is the objective descriptor of reality and that as humans we are here to understand, conquer and subdue nature, in short: to rule. This also necessitates the perception that we are separate from nature. As it is painfully evident now, this highly anthropocentric perspective has taken us further than ever before in the history of this planet: to the point where human selfish and despotic activity has become so destructive to our own habitat that we threaten our very existence.

“Modern man does not consider himself as a part of nature, but as an outside force to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a ‘battle’ with nature, forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side.” FRITZ SCHUMACHER in “Small is Beautiful”

As “rulers” we are but corrupt administrators of a world that we perceive as hostile and against which we have to defend ourselves. In a way, we are at war with nature – and live in the belief that we can gain and retain the upper hand. Wherever we can squeeze something out of her, we will do our level best to achieve that, solely to our own advantage and in such a short-sighted way that we seem to care only for the well-being of our own generation.

We only feel the need to react if a substantial obstacle appears in our path, and even then our strategy amounts to not more than avoiding. We see the obstacle, the problem, as if it were objectively outside ourselves. So we target the problem to make it go away. Our mentality is one of projection, fire fighting and symptom suppression. Only immediate pain or the imminent threat of death appears to be able to stop us in our tracks and galvanise us into taking remedial action. But pain or death are not looming imminently, at least not how

we see life in our western societies; the threats are predictions for the next or the next-but-one generation. So, as a society, we are hurtling on...

The new sciences paint a different picture: the world as an organism, alive and creative and we human beings an integral part of it. Our role here has fundamentally changed from that of rulers to responsible, active participants and co-creators. From this perspective, reality is subjective as we use language to create our reality. The mind-set is less reactive but more experimental, in other words, we are actively imagining what we want and how we want things, and then try it out!

There is no one right way to do things. We employ what works, but always holding the bigger and long-term picture in mind and having the well-being of the whole at heart. In this image of the universe there is an intrinsic interconnection between all parts. In day-to-day life this translates into a set of values and ethics based on caring, openness and creativity – an exciting notion when confronted with the doom and challenges of our current time. As human beings we have the capacity to shape our own future, we can consciously co-create a world as we want it, we are creative!

“What makes sustainability such a big issue is that it goes right to the heart of what it is that makes us human – as we learn to articulate our essential human-ness in and through nature, rather than by continuing to wage war on nature. And that’s what creativity means for me.”

JONATHAN PORRITT

Implicit in this realisation is an imperative: to create. Society on the whole colludes in raising its offspring as conformists, as upholders of the status quo, as colourless, middle-of-the-road, dependent citizens. From an early age on creativity is frowned upon as “too this, too that”, and the young person has no chance but to believe that s/he is better off remaining colourless and letting someone else do the thinking. It is uncomfortable if someone starts thinking for themselves.

The moment one thinks, one makes changes and creates...On a very deep level there exists the taboo of creation which bans the human being from challenging the gods for wisdom, knowledge – and the ability to create. “Original sin” has been for eons humanity’s punishment with suffering and death. Psychologically we connect creativity with suffering and pain. However, each one of us will have felt at some time, deep inside, the impulse to create and will have then felt the pain it causes to strangle and repress this impulse. The taboo covers this struggle with a veil of shame and guilt. Here and there however, a human being hears the inner call to self-actualisation, to become who s/he really is and finds the courage to pull this veil off – redemption in the liberation of creativity.