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Dear Reader,

It was not difficult to select the topic for this month's issue. With so much turmoil going on, with the sense of a tsunami-type wave approaching, and with no clear understanding what this may mean, not only for the US economy but also for the global economy, I found a strong need to pause and reflect. There are many lessons to be learned, and I share a few personal thoughts here.

Enjoy the reading — and find your own lessons.

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"Either we all hang together or we'll hang separately."

Benjamin Franklin, 1706-1790

Upcoming LIM-Related Events

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in Seattle and New York City.
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Greed and Competition: We got it wrong

by Isabel Rimanoczy

In a recent article^[1] David Korten writes: "For the past 5,000 years we humans have devoted much creative energy to perfecting our capacity for greed and violence – a practice that has been enormously costly for our children, families, communities, and nature". This is true, and as a

consequence we are, I believe, on the verge of environmental and social collapse, as we struggle with economical turmoil that is impacting our way of life. How did this happen?

Are there some lessons for us in the past?

Let's take a look back. *Homo sapiens* emerged on the African continent somewhere between one hundred thousand and two hundred thousand years ago. For 90-95% of the time, that means up to approximately 11,000 BCE, these early people were mostly organized into bands of five to eighty males and female adults and their children. They were food gatherers and lived on wild fruit and roots, hunting and fishing for food. Members of the band shared the available food and the benefits of community life. ^[2] Just ponder this for one moment: between ninety thousand and one-hundred-ninety THOUSAND years, living in harmony with their environment. Is this what we refer to when we say "sustainability"?

According to Korten, about 7000 BCE the first settlements of agriculture appeared in some regions, marking the start of accumulation of food, wealth and botanical knowledge. This allowed for higher population densities and accelerated innovation, and it allowed for more complex organizational structures such as small towns.

The gradual pace of social life progressed until relatively recently — a couple of hundred years ago — when it was drastically altered by the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution introduced large-scale manufacturing, tools and technology; it resulted in increasing the productivity of labor hundredfold; it changed the very essence of the way we lived, thought about ourselves and viewed the world. It was, arguably, the most impactful event in some two hundred thousand years of human existence.

Among the results of the revolution was the spread of innovation, an exploding population and a boom in the material standards of living. Life expectancy roughly doubled in the industrial world, literacy jumped from 20 to over 90 percent, products and services emerged that were unimaginable even a few decades ago: Google Earth, i-phones, YouTube, e-Bay, virtual golf^[3]. This was success beyond our wildest dreams, and that is a problem. When things go well we easily get mesmerized by success and fail to see the consequences and side effects of what we are doing, and how we are doing it.

Then, in the last stage of the industrial era, something extremely important happened. Globalization. Spurred by the power of the Internet, all parts of the globe have easy access to information and communication. This access leads to the increased transportation of goods and people, of corporations expanding geographically, and the massive movement of products, services, jobs and investments that practically crisscross the planet.

The butterfly lesson

We are all familiar with MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz's piquant observation in his 1972 paper "*Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas*". The innumerable interconnections of the natural world, Lorenz posited, mean a butterfly's flap could cause a tornado — or, for all we know, could prevent one. He was suggesting that there are so many interconnections that it is impossible to track clearly all cause-effect relationships. Considering the way his phrase has resonated with us, there seems to be a growing acceptance of how everything is

connected to everything else, how isolation, distance and national culture do not guard us from the impact of connectivity.

Thus globalization is, in a way, not an exception, but a logical and material extension of the butterfly effect! In addition to enhancing the natural interconnections, globalization has brought a degree of interdependence between regions and nations that did not exist before; it also creates global problems that have no precedent. We have ready evidence of environmental crises such as rising levels of waste and toxicity that spill over country borders; the stress on natural resources that we took for granted but which are now becoming scarce, or polluted; a widening gap between the wealthy and the poor with alarming effects of the imbalances; and the destruction of property and lives that result from global terrorism.

The story we tell ourselves

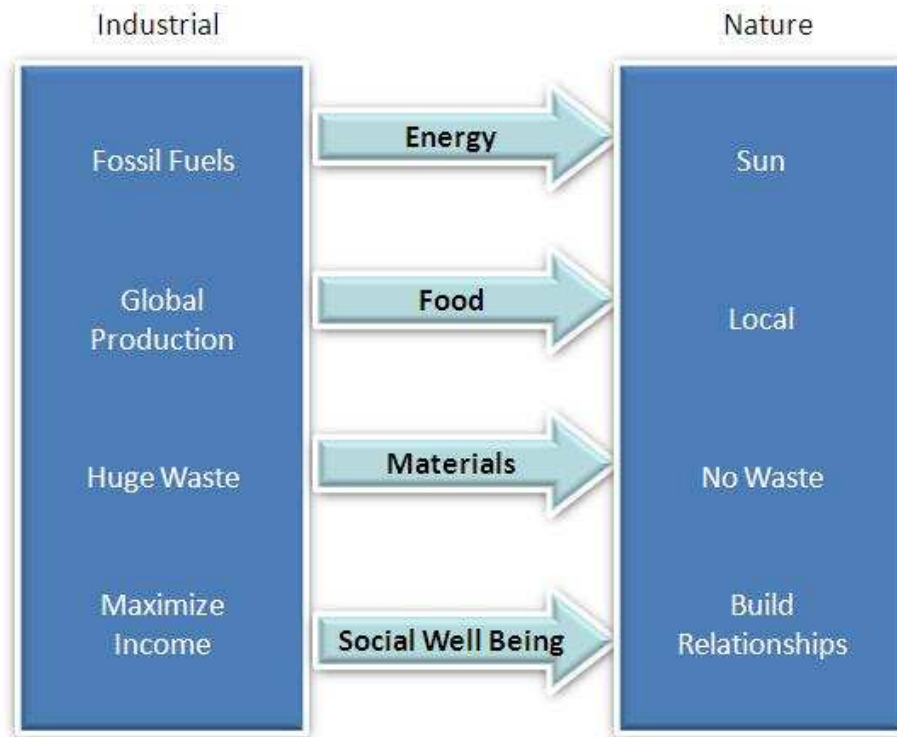
Korten suggests that we carry a story in our heads that is historically recent, considering the many years on Earth of the human race. This story that we repeat to each other is built around a number of beliefs:

- It is our human nature to be competitive, individualistic and materialistic
- Our well-being depends on strong leaders to protect us from enemies
- The competitive forces of a free, unregulated market channel our individual greed to constructive ends
- The competition for survival and dominance — violent and destructive as it may be — is the driving force of evolution
- The most worthy people rise to positions of leadership and they work to the benefit of everyone
- We have enough natural resources for whatever needs we may have

It seems that those beliefs are grounded in some questionable assumptions. Let's take the belief in the survival of the fittest, for example, a concept developed by social philosopher Herbert Spencer and cited by Darwin, who used the term "natural selection" in the late 1800s. This expression has been misinterpreted over time as a violent struggle for survival, where the more powerful dominate the weakest. But actually the "fittest" referred to the best suited to the environment, those which are best fitted to survive. So it can mean anything from the most sensitive, flexible, best camouflaged or the most fecund, smart or cooperative. "Forget Rambo, think Einstein or Gandhi", writes Michael Le Page in the NewScientist.com.

"What we see in the wild is not every animal for itself. Cooperation is an incredibly successful survival strategy. Indeed it has been the basis of all the most dramatic steps in the history of life. Complex cells evolved from cooperating simple cells. Multi-cellular organisms are made up of cooperating complex cells. Super-organisms such as bee or ant colonies consist of cooperating individuals", reminds Le Page. "When the cooperation breaks down the results can be disastrous. When cells in our bodies turn rogue, for instance, the result is cancer. So elaborate mechanisms have evolved to maintain cooperation and suppress selfishness, such as cellular "surveillance" programs that trigger cell suicide if they start to turn cancerous."

In their recently published book *The Necessary Revolution*, Peter Senge et al. present an eloquent illustration, suggesting where to find our answers for what we did wrong, and where we need to go back to:



In Nature, energy comes from the sun. Humankind replaced it with burning fossil fuels, that are polluting the atmosphere, waters and soil, and that are becoming scarcer and generating social conflicts and fights over resources.

How far does a bird or a puma go for his food? In Nature, food is local, and our ancestors knew this intuitively. We thought we knew better, and developed a process that ships products across the globe, using even more energy from burning fossil fuels. The average dinner plate of an American has traveled over 2000 miles, I heard once. I took a look at my dinner plate, and started counting: shrimp imported from Thailand; olive oil from Italy, jasmine rice from Thailand, red pepper flakes from California, soy sauce from Wisconsin, fresh basil from Ohio, garlic from Argentina, wine from Australia, gouda cheese from the Netherlands, and strawberries from California. I was thrilled to discover that the sugar actually came from Florida, which is where I live. My count was twenty times higher.

In Nature there is no waste. Waste is a nutrient for another link in the chain. In contrast, 70% of the raw materials used in the United States in manufacturing processes go to waste. The per capita waste in the US alone is one ton per day. Someone asked once: When you throw something away, where does it go? What is "away", on this planet? We follow the 'take-make-waste' principle, while Nature goes by 'reuse-restore-recycle'.

Finally, Senge et al. highlight that for millennia healthy societies endured by fostering a sense of

community, confident that the basic needs would be met through promotion of the expression of individual gifts and aspirations. By contrast, in the "bubble" we inhabit, we believe that well-being means material possessions and increased comfort. Research has shown however that after the basic needs are met, there is little correlation between increased material comfort and people's sense of well-being.^[4]

What's the point?

So what is all this telling us? Social scientists, authors, philosophers and researchers are all engaged in making sense of the new data and bewildering signs that surround us. Korten indicates that despite the "constant mantra that there is no alternative to greed and competition", daily experience and a growing body of scientific evidence support the thesis that we humans are "born to connect, learn and serve". We are "hard-wired" to create communities and get satisfaction from caring relationships rather than material consumption.

Senge et al. suggest the need to learn to see the systemic interconnections. The world we are creating is heightening interdependence, and it is even more important than ever to pay attention to the larger systems in which we operate. Use of raw materials and natural resources, the consumption habits, the way we treat each other when we think differently and the rules of our economies are all following the *short term* view. This is a tragic myopic view, and we are beginning to pay the high price for our myopic behavior. And we all will pay the price, every society, not just the USA.

Journalist and author Paul Hawken^[5] describes extensively how the Industrial Age beliefs are actually already being challenged across the world, in small and numerous pockets of grassroots activists. He began an inventory (www.wiserearth.org) to identify how many environmental, social justices, and indigenous peoples' rights organizations existed in the world. He estimated 100,000 but now figures there exist more than one million— and may be even two-- million organizations working toward ecological sustainability and social justice. He decided to name this a movement, although in conventional terms a movement has leaders and ideologies; people *join* movements. This movement however doesn't fit that definition. It is dispersed and very independent; it has no doctrine, no overriding authority; it is happening in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, companies, deserts, fisheries, slums "and even in fancy New York hotels". What the different faces of this movement have in common is the humanitarian cause, the understanding that we are on the verge of a collapse of our familiar social, environmental, and economic systems. Something has to change, fast. And that the best way to get change going, is to begin to take action on what is, he concludes, the largest social movement in all of human history.

We all have the obligation to act. Everyone has a role to play. If we believe the problems are far too big for us individuals to make a difference, we may be actively fulfilling a prophecy.



[1] David Korten. *We are hard-wired to care and connect*, in Yes! Magazine, Fall 2008 www.yesmagazine.org

[2] Jared Diamond (1999). *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W.W.Norton,

[3] Senge, P., Smith, B., Kruschwitz, N., Laur, J., and Schley, Sara (2008). *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*. New York: Doubleday. p. 8

[4] See quotations of multiple studies in Senge, op.cit, page 390, ref 3)

[5] Paul Hawken (2007). *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*. New York: Viking Penguin.

Upcoming LIM-Related Events

Be sure to check out and register for upcoming events
in Seattle and New York City.

SoL Academy in Seattle WA (USA): "Leaving a Legacy: Social and Environmental Responsibility, a Task for Corporations and Individuals"

Co-sponsored by Boeing with LIM Partner Isabel Rimanoczy leading an experiential workshop.

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OD Network @ Saks Fifth Avenue, New York City: "Action Reflection Learning: Principles and Elements that can optimize your learning interventions"

Guest Speaker: Isabel Rimanoczy

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Teachers College, Columbia University, New York: "Designing Effective Learning Interventions: Applying Action Reflection Learning Principles"

An Experiential Workshop and Socratic Conversation led by Isabel Rimanoczy and Ron Gross.

► Read More: [LIM Events - Interventions](#)

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York: "Social and Environmental Responsibility: A workshop to leverage the action opportunities of adult educators"

► Read More: [LIM Events - Social & Environmental Responsibility](#)

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